COMBAT

American Revolution 1775–83

Continental Soldier VERSUS Hessian Soldier

Robbie MacNiven

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Illustrated by Marco Capparoni

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Introduction

In May 1775 the Second Continental Congress, directing revolutionary efforts in Britain's North American colonies, began to debate the idea of raising a single, unified army to resist British military aggression. The early stages of the Revolutionary War (1775–83) saw combat efforts confined to pro-Congress militias which, in New England, had been molded into the early stages of a regular army in order to besiege British-held Boston. Additional forces were initially intended to be raised to supplement the siege, as well as to defend New York City from a perceived British move to capture it and support and organize its large Loyalist population.

On June 15, General George Washington was elected as commander-in-chief of this fledgling regular army. Later in the war, he wrote that "regular troops alone are equal to the exigencies of modern war, as well for defense as offense … no militia will ever acquire the habits necessary to resist a

George Washington and the triumphal entry of Continental Army into New York in 1783. Starting out as little more than a composite militia force, by the time of the final British and Hessian evacuation, the Continental Army was a fully professional fighting force capable of matching European militaries in the field. (Photo 12/Alamy Stock Photo)

George Washington, painted in 1776 by Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827). Though not the infallible titan of Revolutionary War myth, Washington's steadfast leadership and willingness to endure near-constant adversity earned him the approbation of both friend and foe. (Brooklyn Museum/ Wikimedia/Public Domain)

regular force. The firmness requisite for the real business of fighting is only to be attained by a constant course of discipline and service" (Washington 2020: 203). It was upon this train of thought that the Continental Army was founded.

The first units to be raised were ten companies of riflemen, on the terms of a single year's enlistment, drawn from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia and intended to act as a light-infantry force assisting the troops besieging Boston. On January 1, 1776, these companies formally became the 1st Continental Regiment. While there was a general aversion to the creation of a standing army among the revolutionaries, Congress accepted that a professional military force drawn from across the North American colonies would be required if Britain was to be defeated and full American independence was to be secured. Over the next seven years, this new Continental Army would go through numerous large- and small-scale evolutions and reforms, gaining combat experience and professionalizing in the blazing crucible of war – a crucible from which it would ultimately emerge victorious.

Britain was ill-prepared for the outbreak of hostilities in North America in 1775, and it was apparent to His Majesty's Government in London that allies who could provide immediate military manpower would be required if the revolutionaries were to be suppressed by force. The decision was made to

seek alliances with a number of German states, many of which were eager to give armed assistance in exchange for monetary reward.

Hessen-Cassel was one of seven German states that ultimately provided military forces to Britain during the Revolutionary War; the others were Hannover, Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Hessen-Hanau, Waldeck, Ansbach-Bayreuth, and Anhalt-Zerbst. The Hessen-Cassel contingent was comfortably the largest contribution by any one of the seven states, and it is the forces of Hessen-Cassel, rather than German auxiliary troops more generally, that are the focus of his book.

Like many of its neighbors, Hessen-Cassel profited from providing military muscle to the warring powers of Europe, usually to the side that could pay the most. While almost every major state counted Hessian troops among its ranks at some point during the 18th century, Britain was Hessen-Cassel's most regular customer. Hessians were hired by Britain to help defeat the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745; were purchased again in 1726 as part of the Quadruple Alliance and once again in 1731; and in 1756, during the Seven Years' War. Troops from Hessen-Cassel were therefore a natural choice in Britain's quest for assistance in quashing its colonial rebellion.

Troop numbers and costs were agreed between Britain and the Landgraf of Hessen-Cassel, Friedrich II, and a treaty was signed on January 15, 1776. A corps was assembled, with British input, for an expedition to North America. The treaty stipulated four battalions of grenadiers, fifteen battalions of infantry, two companies of *Jäger*, with two cannons supporting each battalion forming a trio of artillery companies – a total of 12,000 men. This force left Hessen-Cassel in two separate divisions. The first, commanded by the overall leader of Hessian forces in North America, Lieutenant-General Leopold Philip Theodor von Heister, arrived in America on August 12, 1776, and consisted of: the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment; *Musketier-Regimenter* von Donop, Prinz Carl, von Mirbach, and von Trümbach; *Füsilier-Regimenter* von Ditfurth, Erbprinz, von Knyphausen, and von Lossberg; Grenadier-Regiment Rall, and the composite grenadier battalions von Block, von Linsing, and von Minnigerode; one *Jäger* company; and two artillery companies. The second

First raised in 1702, Musketier-Regiment Prinz Carl was part of the Hessian expedition sent to assist the British crown in North America, where it saw action at White Plains. The regiment had limited service for the remainder of the war. Bearskin caps such as the one worn by the grenadier in this image and elsewhere in this book were not adopted until 1784, after the Hessians had returned from North America. (Buyenlarge/Contributor/ Getty Images)

Friedrich II, Landgraf of Hessen-Cassel. Born on August 14, 1720, and becoming *Landgraf* on February 1, 1760, Friedrich II worked hard to maintain Hessen-Cassel's reputation as a provider of excellent military auxiliaries. In 1740 he married Princess Mary, the fourth daughter of King George II of Great Britain, and though his conversion from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism in 1749 harmed his standing among a number of his peers, he still proved to be Britain's most important ally during the Revolutionary War. (Album/ Alamy Stock Photo)

division, commanded by Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen and arriving on October 18, 1776, consisted of: Musketier-Regiment von Wutgenau; *Garnisons-Regimenter* von Bünau, von Huyn, von Stein, and von Wissenbach; Grenadier-Bataillon von Köhler; a second *Jäger* company; and a third artillery company.

Over the seven years of conflict that followed, the Continental Army and the forces of Hessen-Cassel would meet in battle on numerous occasions; but while Hessian units saw action throughout the Revolutionary War and in most theaters of the Eastern Seaboard, the largest and most intense clashes between Continentals and Hessians occurred in the years 1776 and 1777. The period

The New York campaign and the retreat to Pennsylvania, 1776

MAP KEY

1 October 9: After winning the battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, Crown Forces attempted to encircle the Continental Army in New York City following an amphibious assault on Kip's Bay. Washington was able to march his forces out of the trap before it closed, and occupied new defensive positions. After an inconclusive skirmish at Harlem Heights on September 16, Howe eventually decides to attempt to outflank Washington again. On October 9, two British frigates sail up the Hudson River, demonstrating that the Patriot defenses along the river are insufficient to stop them.

2 October 12: British troops mount a new amphibious landing, this time at Throgs Neck, but a Continental holding force keeps them in check and they are unable to push inland.

3 October 18: After a week's delay Crown Forces relocate to another landing point, Pell's Point. British and Hessian regiments push inland, but a smaller force of Continentals is able to delay them.

4 October 19: Howe moves his forces to New Rochelle. Here he delays for three days while he is joined by the second Hessian division, led by Knyphausen.

5 October 21: The Continental holding force from Pell's Point redeploys to Dobbs Ferry.

6 October 21: Skirmishing occurs near the settlement of Mamaroneck as Howe considers shifting north toward White Plains.

7 October 21: Washington and the main body of his army move north in order to avoid becoming trapped by Howe's army. While Howe prevaricates, awaiting reinforcements, Washington's troops arrive at their supply depot at the crossroads at White Plains, occupying defensive works north of the junction.

8 October 27: A British force demonstrates against Fort Washington, allowing Knyphausen's Hessians to capture King's Bridge and cut off Manhattan.

9 October 28: Having shifted his forces to Scarsdale, Howe marches north and engages the Continental Army at the battle of White Plains. British and Hessian forces drive the Patriots from Chatterton Hill, but fail to initiate a decisive battle. After several days, Washington moves farther north.

10 November 4: Declining to attack Washington's new positions farther north of White Plains, Howe marches his army back south with the intention of capturing Fort Washington, the Continental garrison of which is now isolated on Manhattan Island.

11 November 16: The battle of Fort Washington. The fort is seized by a four-pronged British and Hessian assault and its 3,000 Continental defenders surrender.

12 November 28: Following the fall of Fort Washington and the abandonment of Fort Lee, the Continental Army starts to withdraw to the west bank of the Hudson and then south, through New Jersey toward the Delaware River and Pennsylvania. British and Hessian forces set out in pursuit, and Washington narrowly avoids contact with Cornwallis at Newark.

13 November 30: With poor weather slowing both armies, Washington arrives at Brunswick.

14 December 1: A British force is dispatched from New York to capture Rhode Island.

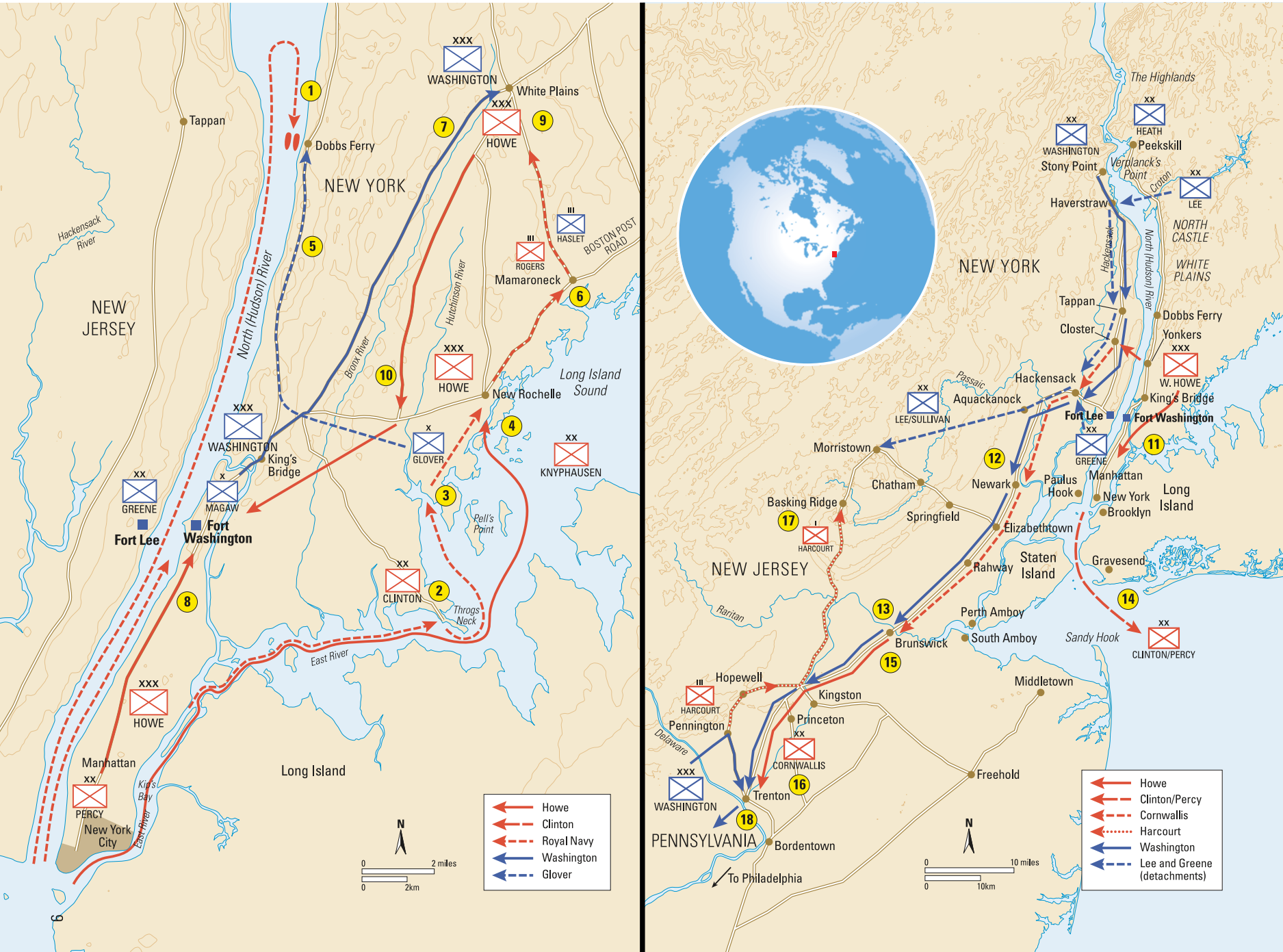
15 December 5: Having paused for five days at Brunswick to allow Howe and reinforcements to catch up, Cornwallis sets out again after Washington.

16 December 7–8: Washington narrowly escapes the pursuing British and Hessians after skirmishes at Princeton and Trenton, making it across the Delaware with his army intact.

17 December 12: Continental Major General Charles Lee is captured by a raiding force of British light dragoons.

18 December 26: With British and Hessian forces having gone into winter quarters in New Jersey, Washington strikes at the isolated Hessian garrison at Trenton, defeating it in a surprise attack and taking 1,400 prisoners.

from August to December 1776 in particular began with the greatest Hessian triumphs in America, and concluded with the Continental Army's most stunning victory over them. This book covers that period of the New York campaign and its aftermath, looking at three pivotal engagements between Continental and Hessian forces – the battles of White Plains, Fort Washington, and Trenton – in order to establish how the two sides met and fought one another, and the impact their combats had on the wider outcome of the war.


NEW YORK
NEW JERSEY
Long Island
PENNSYLVANIA
Tappan
Dobbs Ferry
White Plains
WASHINGTON
HOWE
HASLET
ROGERS
Mamaroneck
BOSTON POST ROAD
Hackensack River
North (Hudson) River
Bronx River
Hutchinson River
New Rochelle
Long Island Sound
KNYPHAUSEN
GLOVER
CLINTON
Pell's Point
Throgs Neck
East River
King's Bridge
GREENE
MAGAW
Fort Lee
Fort Washington
Manhattan
PERCY
New York City
King's Bay
East River
The Highlands
HEATH
Peekskill
Stony Point
Verplanck's Point
Croton
LEE
Haverstraw
NORTH CASTLE
WHITE PLAINS
Hackensack River
North (Hudson) River
Closter
Yonkers
W. HOWE
Passaic
Hackensack
Aquackanock
LEE/SULLIVAN
King's Bridge
Morristown
Chatham
Springfield
Basking Ridge
HARCOURT
Newark
Paulus Hook
Manhattan
New York
Brooklyn
Long Island
Elizabethtown
Staten Island
Rahway
Gravesend
Raritan
Perth Amboy
South Amboy
Sandy Hook
CLINTON/PERCY
Brunswick
Middletown
Hopewell
Kingston
Princeton
Pennington
CORNWALLIS
Delaware
Freehold
Trenton
Bordentown
To Philadelphia
N
0 2 miles
0 2km
0 10 miles
0 10km
Howe
Clinton
Royal Navy
Washington
Glover
Howe
Clinton/Percy
Cornwallis
Harcourt
Washington
Lee and Greene (detachments)

The Opposing Sides

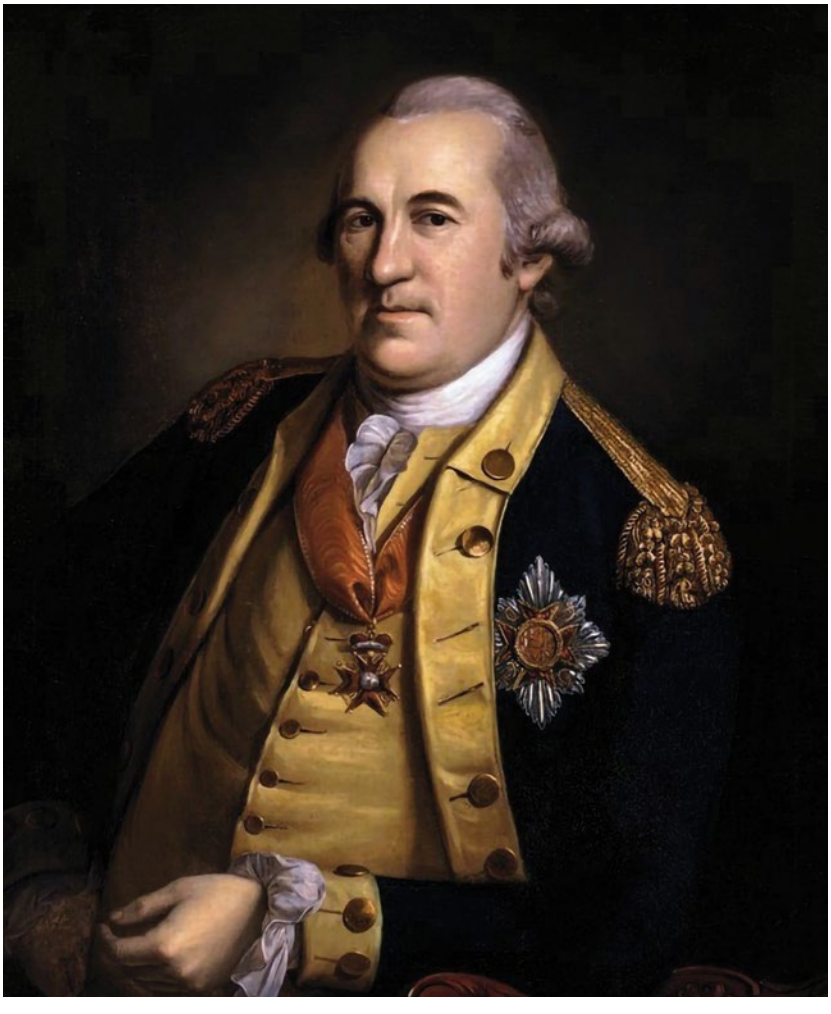
SPEED AND MANEUVERABILITY

Continental

The Continental Army initially prioritized defensive warfare; consequently, its capacity for rapid maneuver on the battlefield was relatively low during the early years of the Revolutionary War. This primarily stemmed from the desire to maximize firepower and force Crown troops into attacking prepared defensive positions head-on – as we shall see – but was also partially due to the fledgling nature of the Continental Army as a professional force in 1776. Quick, efficient maneuvering of regiments and brigades amid the stresses of a battlefield environment were among the most difficult techniques that needed to be mastered by 18th-century militaries, and it was only natural that, with such a relative lack of experience, it would take time before the Continental Army was capable of consistently conducing offensive warfare.

Despite this, Continental units were flexible and maneuverable, at least compared to the European military standard. Like the British, Continental line regiments preferred to fight in two ranks, and varied the use of closed or open order, i.e. the distance between files. Open order, a distance of generally about 18in, allowed regiments to more effectively pass through the difficult or rugged terrain common on North American battlefields, not only woodland but also the numerous wooden and stone fences that demarcated fields and general boundaries. The ability to traverse such common obstacles, including in the midst of combat, without losing unit coherency was a vital aspect that both sides fighting in North America were required to master.

Skirmishing also played an important role in the battlefield doctrine of the revolutionary forces, and while it was often considered the preserve of militia units (though their use of irregular warfare compared to formed, linear warfare has often been exaggerated), Continental units were also



Depicted here by Charles Willson Peale, Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben was a Prussian officer who served in the Continental Army under the title of inspector general. A veteran of the Seven Years' War, he was responsible for much of the effective drilling and training the Continental Army underwent during the middle years of the Revolutionary War, transforming it into a military force capable of competing with the British in pitched battle. (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts/ Wikimedia/Public Domain)

capable of engaging the enemy in skirmish operations. Foremost among these troops were those armed with rifles. Sometimes, these were a single or several companies forming part of a larger, smoothbore-armed Continental regiment, but at other times they formed entire regiments themselves, such as the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment (known as Rawlings' Regiment after its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Moses Rawlings) or the later Provisional Rifle Corps. There were also provisional light-infantry formations, such as Lieutenant Colonel Henry Dearborn's corps, which were armed with smoothbores but acted in a light-infantry capacity, at their best conducing scouting and probing operations, screening the main battle line or harassing the enemy, preferably from behind cover. The presence of such troops added to the tactical flexibility of Continental forces, and ensured that in general only British light infantry or Hessian *Jäger* could reliably match them consistently in the *petite guerre* for which the Revolutionary War is often remembered.

That is not to say that familiarity with the terrain of North America or skill when it came to woodland warfare meant that the Patriots were masters of their environment. The Continental Army's ultimate aim was to engage the British Army in regular, linear warfare and, eventually, defeat it, rather than

COMBAT

Private, 1st Maryland Regiment

This private of the 1st Maryland Regiment (sometimes known as Smallwood's Regiment after its commander, Colonel William Smallwood) is preparing to meet the British attack at Chatterton Hill, during the battle of White Plains. He has already seen hard fighting at Long Island on August 27, 1776, where he helped secure the escape of most of the Patriot troops involved following a fierce rearguard action. The Marylanders went on to be one of the most heavily engaged Continental regiments of the war.

White Plains, October 28, 1776

Weapons, dress, and equipment

This Continental private from a line company of the 1st Maryland Regiment is armed with what was later known as the Long Land Pattern British musket (**1**), sometimes called the Brown Bess. In the early stages of the Revolutionary War, these weapons were common armaments for the Continental Army, either previously used by the militia or seized from Crown stores and captured British soldiers. As the war progressed a huge influx of French muskets of a type now commonly known as Charleville after its place of manufacture in France, supplemented Continental arms. He also possesses a bayonet (**2**), a luxury not all Continental regiments could afford. The Marylanders may have been the first Patriots to use them against British regulars in a massed offensive capacity, during the battle of Long Island.

His uniform consists primarily of a partly cocked hat (**3**), breeches (**4**), stockings and half-gaiters (**5**), and a hunting shirt (**6**). The soldiers of the 1st Maryland Regiment were issued hunting shirts in early 1776. Such clothing was easily produced and, though most typically a frontier garment, was associated with the American colonies in general, and was considered by some officers to be a fitting uniform for the Patriot army. Although regimental coats – some of them supplied by the French – were the norm for most Continental regiments, hunting shirts continued to be used by some units at various stages throughout the war.

For accouterments, he has a pair of black leather belts (**7**) for his bayonet and scabbard, as well as a cartridge pouch (**8**). While pouches were commonly used for carrying premade ammunition, undersupplied Continental units sometimes had to make do with simpler cartridge boxes or tins. He also has a round wooden canteen (**9**). These were common for Continental soldiers, though tin ones were also sometimes used. His haversack and blanket roll have been discarded for combat.

Continental forces on the march. The ability of the Continental Army to mobilize and mount fast-moving offensive operations in the middle of winter, despite notable difficulties with clothing and supplies, caught Crown forces totally off-guard in 1776. (Niday Picture Library/Alamy Stock Photo)

wage what we might now think of as guerrilla warfare. Because of this, terrain could hamper the Continentals' movements on the battlefield, and this became more apparent as the Continental Army conversely gained in experience and confidence, and began conducting more offensive operations. At the battle of Germantown, for example, fought on October 4, 1777, the Continental Army's offensive was slowed by woodland and rail fences that badly disrupted its formations (Spring 2007: 140–41). Even more pronounced was the battle of Green Spring, fought on July 6, 1781. Lieutenant Colonel John Francis Mercer, describing the battle, wrote that Continental troops fought in close order and subsequently could not match the speed and maneuverability of the British forces opposing them:

> We had just begun to assume the stiff German tactics, as the British acquir'd the good sense, from experience in our woody country, to lay it aside. Gen'l Wayne's Brigade were drawn up in such close order as to render it utterly impracticable to advance in line & preserve their order – the line was necessarily broke by the trees as they pass'd the wood. The British advanc'd in open order at arm's length & aiming very low kept up a deadly fire … Gen'l Wayne gave repeated orders for the line to charge, but this operation was really impossible from the manner in which they were form'd & cou'd not be push'd forward. (Mercer 1892: 50)

It is interesting to note that the words "stiff German tactics" were likely a reference to the drills of Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who in 1778 had codified the Continental Army's drill and accelerated its professionalization as a European-style regular army. Steuben had served previously with the Prussian Army, and while his reforms were widely seen as having a positive effect on the Continentals, not every officer approved of his preferred style of fighting. At times Continental forces adopted the same close order employed by the Hessians, and subsequently suffered the same problems with speed and maneuverability those German troops experienced on the battlefield.

Hessian

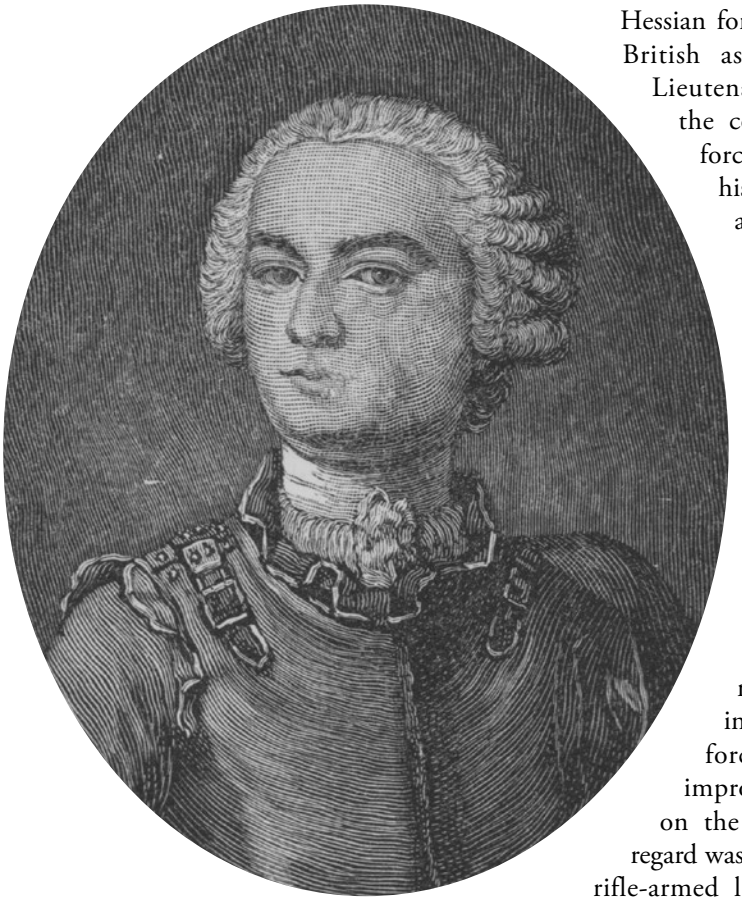
Lieutenant-General Leopold Philip Theodor von Heister was commander of the Hesse-Cassel forces in North America from their arrival in August 1776 to his removal from command by the summer of 1777. Experienced and seemingly well enough liked by his men, Heister acquired a reputation for being too slow and indecisive for the tastes of the British commander-in-chief, Lieutenant-General William Howe. (The History Collection/Alamy Stock Photo)

Hessian forces during the Revolutionary War have been stereotyped as slow-moving and cumbersome, and there is a degree of truth to this characterization. The Hessians were usually forbidden, for much of the war, from adopting all of the tactical modifications the British had made for fighting in North America. Unlike both the British and their Patriot enemies, Hessian regiments typically formed line in close order, elbow to elbow, although they did adopt two ranks instead of three. Close order helped to maximize the concentration of a regiment's firepower, but left it less able to maneuver at speed through rugged or forested terrain.

A lack of fluidity was further compounded by the fact that the standard Hessian marching pace was slower than both the British and Continental armies. The Hessian ordinary step was 75 paces per minute, and the quick step, used for wheeling, 110, but British forces often conducted all of their maneuvers at their quick time, which was between 120 and 150 paces per minute (Spring 2007: 144–47). Some exceptions were made: the Hessian grenadier regiments, for example, because they were brigaded with the fast-moving British grenadier and light-infantry battalions in the army's vanguard, were initially permitted to mimic their style of formation and movement. Overall, however, Hessian regiments could prove slow and unwieldy on the battlefield, and sometimes failed entirely to reach combat. After the battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, one British officer, Lieutenant William John Hale, wrote of the Hessians:

> I believe them steady, but their slowness is of the greatest disadvantage in a country almost covered with woods, and against an enemy whose chief qualification is agility in running from fence to fence and thence keeping up an irregular, but galling fire on troops who advance with the same pace as at their exercise … at Brandywine, when the line first formed, the Hessian Grenadiers were close in our rear, and began beating their march at the same time as us. From that minute we saw them no more till the action was over, and only one man of them was wounded, by a random shot which came over us. (Quoted in Wilkin 1914: 245)

Hessian Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen acknowledged these issues in a letter to the Landgraf dated April 30, 1781, in which he requested putting Hessian regiments in open order, noting that in his experience this proved beneficial as the Hessians, when in close order, could not keep up with the British troops alongside them (Atwood 1980: 244). British commanders sometimes mitigated the slowness of Hessian regiments by using them as a close-order reserve. For example, at the storming of forts Clinton and Montgomery on October 6, 1777, and at the battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778, British Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton chose to keep Hessian regiments in reserve to act as a rallying point should his British troops be repulsed (Spring 2007: 97).



Major-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen was initially the second-in-command of the North American expedition after Lieutenant-General Heister. Though only seven months younger than Heister, Knyphausen showed little of the hesitation for which his superior became infamous. An active campaigner with 42 years of military experience, he was praised by British officers, and rose to command the Hessian corps following Heister's dismissal. (Kean Collection/Staff/Getty Images)

Hessian forces were also described by the British as operationally cumbersome. Lieutenant-General William Howe, the commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, claimed his inability to catch Washington around New York was due to the slowness of the Hessian baggage train – likely an exaggeration, given the Hessians carried no more baggage than the British – and the Hessians were singled out for blame again in June 1777, when on two occasions they were castigated by the British for moving too slowly (Atwood 1980: 111).

That being said, the idea of Hessian troops as slow-moving automata fails to take into account times when Hessian forces did employ tactics that improved their speed and fluidity on the battlefield. Foremost in this regard was the use of the *Jäger* corps, elite, rifle-armed light infantry who were used to match the Patriot predilection for the *petite guerre*. Traditionally drawn from foresters and huntsmen, these soldiers had risen to prominence among the armies of the German states during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), and they quickly acquired a reputation as some of the best troops on either side. According to Johann Ewald, a *Jäger* captain who left a colorful diary of the war, the British Army's Major-General Charles Cornwallis considered one *Jäger* to be worth ten of their enemies.

Though the use of *Jäger* light infantry is well known, they were not the only skirmishers employed in combat by the forces of Hessen-Cassel. Provisional companies of light infantry were formed, known by the Hessians as *chasseurs*, with soldiers armed with smoothbores and bayonets drawn from the regular companies to assist the *Jäger*. Two such companies were created on a temporary basis in December 1776, with a third added in July 1778 and a fourth in December 1779 (Londahl-Smidt 2021: 41–42).

A third, and even more tactically important, innovation involved the use of what the Hessians called *flanquers*. At a number of battles, including Long Island, White Plains, Fort Washington, and Trenton, Hessian regiments deployed platoons of line troops ahead of the main formation to screen it from harassment and put pressure on the enemy. These men, known as *flanquers*, were not dedicated light infantry or even formed into the semipermanent companies of the *chasseurs*, but were often volunteers drawn from the line

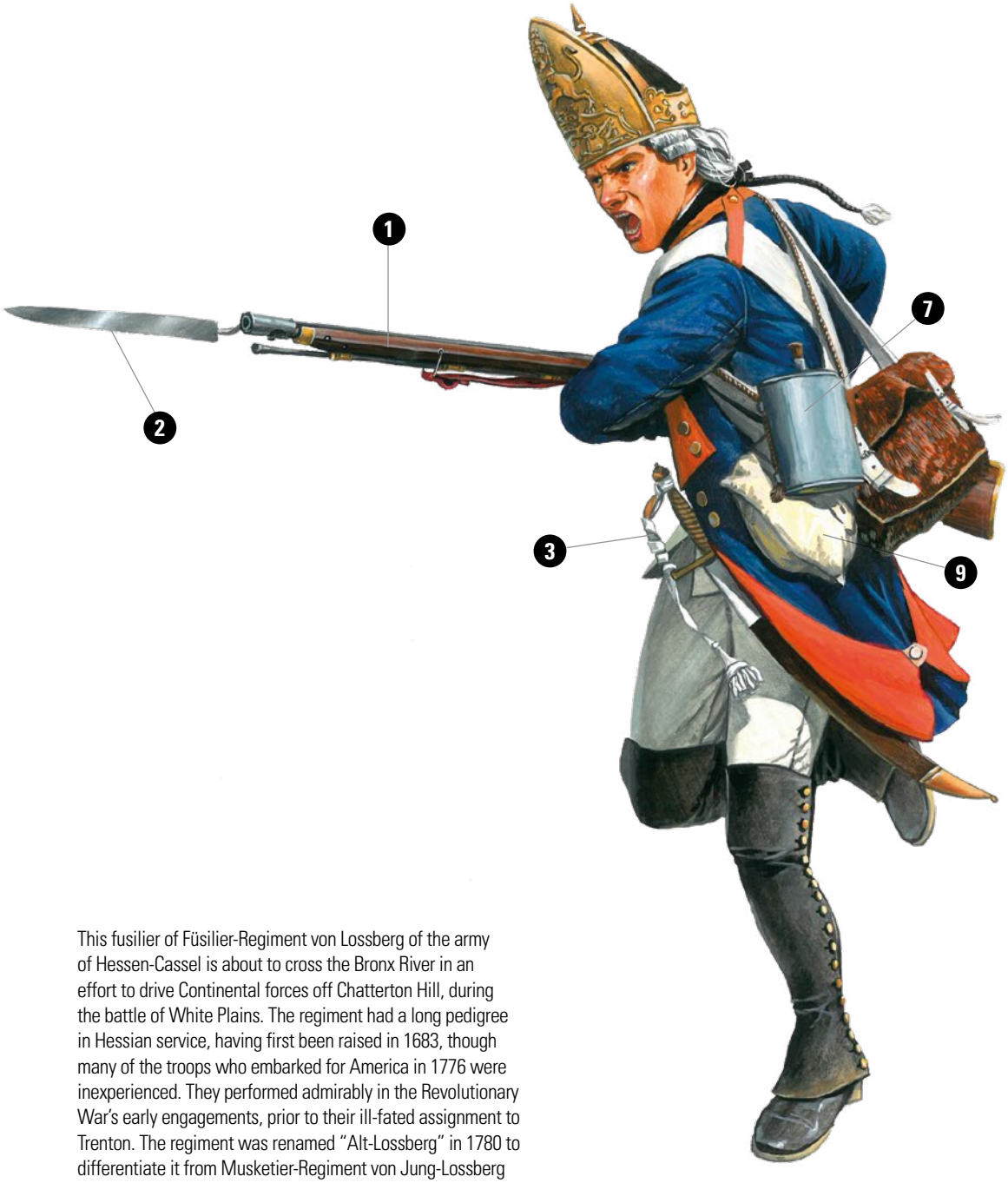
Initially named Musketier-Regiment von Trümbach during its North American service until a change of *Chef* in 1778, Musketier-Regiment von Bose saw action around New York, but won particular renown after it was one of the few Hessian regiments selected to reinforce the British in the South late in the war. It was involved in the capture of Savannah, the battles of Stono Ferry and Eutaw Springs, and gave notable service at the battle of Guilford Courthouse. (Buyenlarge/Getty Images)

companies, organized into platoons and led by a lieutenant, operating in an extended role only for a battle's duration. They were deployed at the discretion of the regimental commander, usually at the start of combat. Grenadiers were also capable of serving in this role. Ideally an advance by Hessians would be screened by *Jäger*, grenadiers, and *flanquers*, a potent force that proved more than capable of driving off Continental skirmishers and militia at engagements such as Long Island (Burns 2023: 44–47).

These fluid, combined-arms formations were put to effective use by the Hessians. Such a style of warfare appears to have not been an adaptation to the fighting in North America, but was learned from the French and Prussian armies during the Seven Years' War, when light-infantry doctrine began its development separate from the practices employed by the British, French, and their respective colonial forces in North America. While not an innovation during the Revolutionary War, the use of *flanquers* aided Hessian military efforts in America, and showed that Hessian forces were capable of tactical versatility.

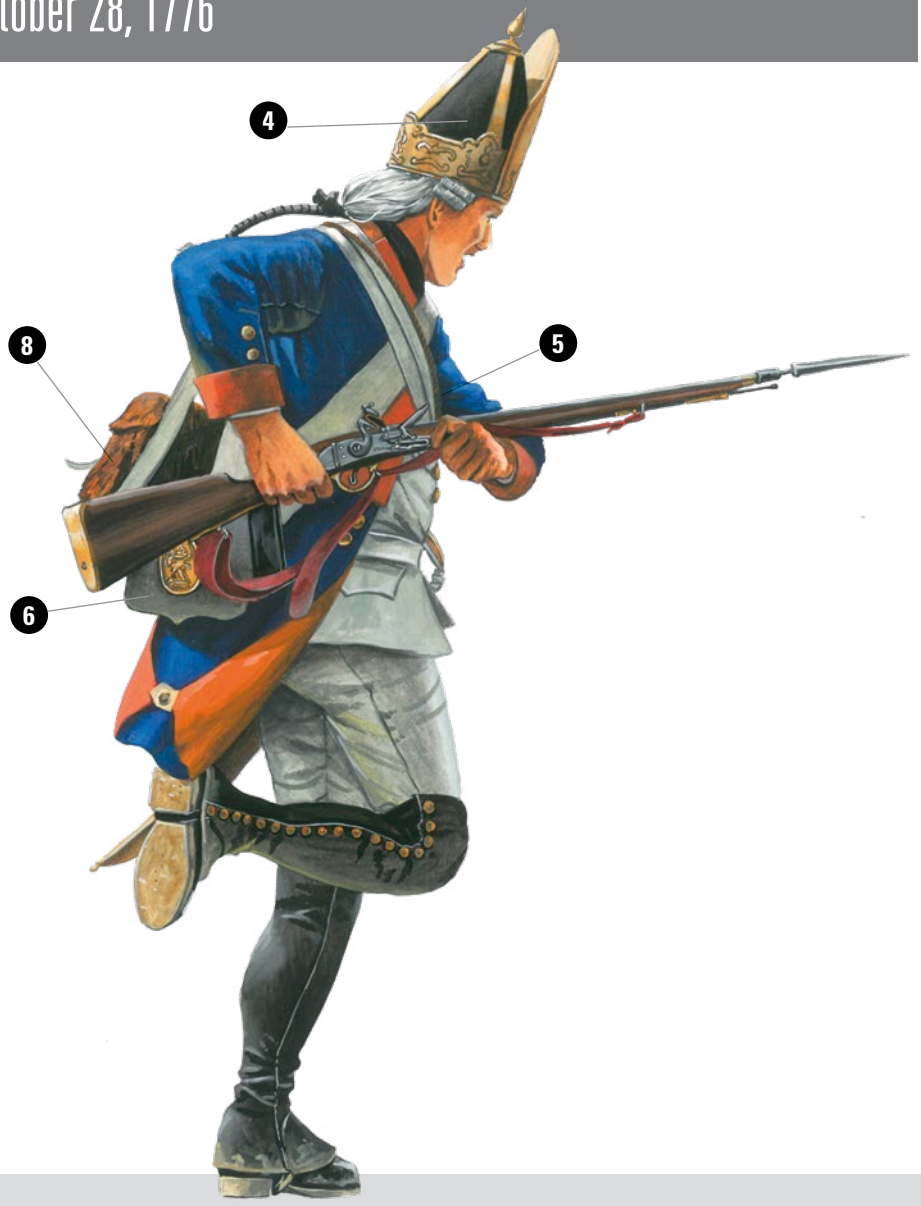
This versatility served them in good stead. At Fort Washington, two Hessian brigades, led by their light infantry, attacked up an almost sheer slope covered with rocks, trees, and undergrowth, eventually overrunning the Continental defenses there and pursuing the Patriots back to Fort Washington, reaching it before a trio of British assault forces attacking the fort from other directions. Even more striking was the service of Musketier-Regiment von Bose (formerly von Trümbach) at the battle of Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781. It would appear at this engagement that the Hessians not only matched the pace of the initial Crown advance, but then equaled the militia troops with whom they became engaged in woodland fighting. At one point the regiment was attacked from both front and behind, but successfully divided its forces, drove off both separate groups of enemy irregulars, and then reformed to continue their advance. This kind of tactical fluidity conducted in the heat of battle and in difficult terrain indicates that the Hessians were not necessarily the cumbersome and hidebound troops they are sometimes made out to be (Burns 2023: 41).

Fusilier, Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg



This fusilier of Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg of the army of Hessen-Cassel is about to cross the Bronx River in an effort to drive Continental forces off Chatterton Hill, during the battle of White Plains. The regiment had a long pedigree in Hessian service, having first been raised in 1683, though many of the troops who embarked for America in 1776 were inexperienced. They performed admirably in the Revolutionary War's early engagements, prior to their ill-fated assignment to Trenton. The regiment was renamed "Alt-Lossberg" in 1780 to differentiate it from Musketier-Regiment von Jung-Lossberg (formerly von Mirbach), commanded by Major-General Friedrich Wilhelm von Lossberg.

White Plains, October 28, 1776



Weapons, dress, and equipment

For armaments, this Hessian fusilier is equipped with a Dutch-made smoothbore musket (**1**). Many Hessians were supplied with British Brown Bess muskets or with weapons manufactured in the German states, but ensuring the Hessian corps in America was fully armed meant acquiring weapons from different sources. Along with the musket, he is armed with a bayonet (**2**) as well as a sword (**3**), sometimes called a hanger – this weapon was carried by fusiliers and grenadiers but not the musketeer or garrison regiments, and was rarely resorted to over the bayonet.

The fusilier is most readily identifiable by his fusilier cap (**4**), though it is easily mistaken for the famed Hessian grenadier cap. The caps worn by fusiliers were similar in style, with a brass front plate bearing the lion rampant of Hessen-Cassel. The fusilier caps were smaller than grenadier caps, however, and possessed a small spike on their tops rather than a tasseled pompon. The fact that this figure does not have a moustache also indicates he is a fusilier rather than a grenadier.

Hessian uniform regulations were closely based on the Prussian model, and this is most obvious in the style of regimental coat (**5**). To help with economy, most bore no lace and were close-fitting. The regimental facing color was orange.

The fusilier carries his ammunition in a black leather cartridge pouch (**6**) suspended from a thick white belt, which is in turn kept in place by the coat's single shoulder strap, usually a little back from the top of the shoulder. To help hold the cartridge pouch's flap down, it bears a heavy brass oval etched with the Hessian lion. Grenadier pouches included a flaming-grenade design, also in brass, in each corner. He also carries a canteen (**7**), knapsack (**8**), and haversack (**9**).

FIREPOWER

Continental

Attaining and maintaining fire superiority on the battlefield was the primary tactical consideration for Continental Army infantry. Contrary to some popular beliefs, not all colonial-era Americans owned or were proficient with firearms, and pre-Revolutionary War militia activity was patchy for large sections of colonial society. On average, however, American colonists were more familiar with firearms than their counterparts in Britain and the German states. This combined with the concept that the colonists were more accurate marksmen – exaggerated or not – helped shape Continental Army doctrine. It is worth noting, for example, that when Steuben, tasked with standardizing the Continental Army's drill, suggested that the command for leveling firearms at the enemy be "present," the board of Continental officers overseeing the drill book's final draft had it changed to "take aim." The command "present," common to militaries of the period, did not actually preclude taking aim – British soldiers, for example, were taught marksmanship, and were expected to aim well when leveling their weapons – but the specific command "take aim" reflected how firearms accuracy was a point of pride for the Americans.

Likely even more important than individual marksmanship was the Continental Army's ability to amass firepower. While individual Continental regiments were often acutely undersized compared to their on-paper establishment throughout the war, they still enjoyed overall numerical superiority over the British and Hessians in almost every major battlefield engagement. The massing of understrength regiments into brigades meant that typically one brigade would face off against a single British regiment, with a consequent advantage in numbers that meant Crown Forces were unable to engage in protracted firefights for any period of time.

Continental regiments also enjoyed a slightly better ratio of officers and NCOs to privates compared to both their British and Hessian opponents, with a standard company having one officer, sergeant, or corporal to every 6.3 privates, compared to a Hessian company, which had an equivalent ratio of one to every 7.5 privates. This theoretically enabled better fire control during combat, and also helped maintain command and control when a battalion was in extended order or engaging across broken terrain. Control was further assisted by the preference for single, battalion-wide volleys, rather than the sometimes-complex system of firing by platoon.

Ennion Williams was born near Philadelphia in 1752. A merchant, educator, and surveyor, he joined the Continental Army and in 1776 was serving as a major in Colonel Samuel Selden Miles's Pennsylvanian Rifle Regiment. This piece, painted for Williams' wife by Charles Willson Peale in mid-to-late October 1776, gives an insight into Continental Army officers' uniforms during the early part of the Revolutionary War. (Metropolitan Museum of Art/Dale T. Johnson Fund, 2006/Wikimedia/CC0 1.0)

An example of ammunition used by both Hessian and Continental forces. Lead musket balls and premeasured amounts of gunpowder were placed into cartridges made from twists of paper. Continentals sometimes placed two balls in their cartridges, or loose buckshot. (Pacific Press/ Contributor/Getty Images)

The use of rifles also helped enhance Continental fire superiority. The long rifles used by Continental rifle companies and regiments were personal weapons rather than military issue, and suffered from a range of deficiencies that at times reduced their overall effectiveness. They could prove less durable on campaign, and lack of standardization could cause issues with supplies and repairs. The use of patches and, sometimes, powder horns over premade paper cartridges increased reload time and consequently reduced rates of fire. Also, American rifles could not be fitted with bayonets, and this combined with the slow reload time left riflemen vulnerable to enemy close assaults. Rifles were, of course, only as accurate as the men wielding them, and not all American riflemen attained the kind of military omnipotence that one colonial newspaper claimed they enjoyed at the beginning of the war.

Small numbers of riflemen used to enhance the firepower of smoothbore-armed Continental or even militia formations did prove to be an extremely effective combination, however. Some Continental regiments retained one or two companies of rifle-armed troops, thus introducing greater accuracy into the firing line without greatly sacrificing the rate of fire enjoyed by the smoothbore companies. Such troops excelled in particular at picking off officers and artillery crews. Taken as a whole, the firepower of the Continental Army brigade could be a fearsome prospect.

Artillery also played a vital role in the Continental Army's quest for a battle-winning degree of fire superiority. Continental artillery companies were typically small outfits of 2–4 cannon, and sometimes a howitzer. These were often attached to infantry brigades with the intention of providing close fire support, rather than being massed together for a general bombardment or counterbattery fire. The battle of Trenton showed how effective this tactic could be, with Hessian forces unable to site and maintain their own battalion guns properly, while the combination of Continental cannon fire and small arms defeated every Hessian attempt to mount a bayonet charge.

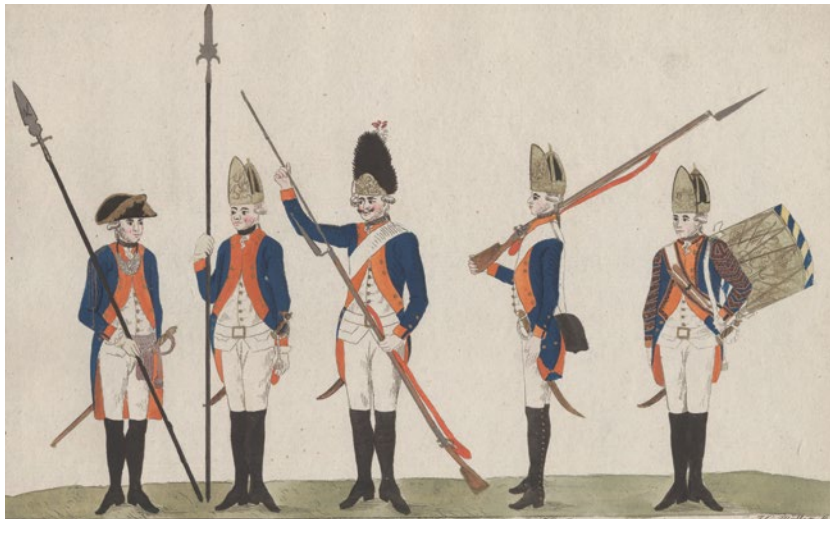
Hessian

The army of Hessen-Cassel largely based itself on that of the most powerful of the northern Germanic states, Prussia, and its drill and doctrine largely followed the army of Frederick the Great. Like the Continentals, Prussian forces also prioritized firepower, though in different ways. Prussian warfare, conducted on mainland Europe, typically involved regiments deploying in three ranks in close order to maximize a concentration of firepower. This was then combined with a near-obsession with rapidity of fire. Prussian soldiers were exhorted to load and fire as quickly as possible, with examples of battalions on training exercises getting off five or even six volleys in a minute.

The realities of combat often heavily reduced the rate of fire, however, and command and control proved difficult to maintain in the midst of an 18th-century firefight, with organized volleys tending to deteriorate rapidly into a "running fire," as each man loaded and fired as quickly as possible with little heed to orders. Accuracy likewise suffered from the prioritizing of the rate of fire.

Hessian forces were capable of delivering fire in a number of different ways, typically by battalion or its various subdivisions. Companies were actually used more for administrative purposes and, on the battlefield, for maneuver, while tactical fire control was the preserve of platoons or squads. Hessians regiments are sometimes criticized for what might seem like unwieldy subdivisions between company and platoon, but the reality is that most European militaries of the period followed similar methods of organization, and it became partially moot as volley firing by platoon was rarely conducted by either side in North America – battalion-wide volleys were the tactical standard. In the British and Hessian case, this was intended as part of their shock tactics, with preference for a single volley followed by a bayonet charge. Like the British, Hessians tended to avoid becoming locked in a protracted firefight with Continental forces.

Hessen-Cassel regiments were accompanied by "battalion guns," light artillery – typically a pair of 3-pounders per regiment – that were expected to



Taking its name from that of its *Chef*, Lieutenant-General Anton Heinrich August von Lossberg, Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg played important roles in the battles of White Plains, Fort Washington, and Trenton. Originally formed in 1683, like all Hessian regiments its name changed as its *Chef*'s identity evolved. In 1780 the unit's title became Füsilier-Regiment von Alt-Lossberg, to distinguish it from Musketier-Regiment von Jung-Lossberg, formerly named von Mirbach but now commanded by Lieutenant-General Friedrich Wilhelm von Lossberg, the younger brother of Alt-Lossberg's commander. Friedrich Wilhelm's son, Lieutenant Johann Karl Jeremias von Lossberg, served in Grenadier-Bataillon von Lengerke. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

Hessian *Jäger* were woodsmen and hunters recruited into elite light-infantry companies, in which they could put their expertise in forest fighting and skirmishing to best use. Equipped with rifles, these units gave Crown Forces the ability to match rebel troops in irregular styles of warfare. Their excellence was such that more *Jäger* reinforcements were requested, and deployed, as the war progressed. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

advance or retire in conjunction with their parent unit, providing close fire support throughout an engagement. There was, however, a propensity for detaching these guns from their regiments and grouping them into batteries to provide a more long-range base of fire. Such bombardments could prove moderately effective, such as the barrages unleashed by concentrated Hessians guns on Chatterton Hill at White Plains and Laurel Hill and the Continental redoubts at Fort Washington, but they deprived the Hessian infantry of close fire support and could leave them vulnerable to the fire superiority of Continental infantry, especially if the latter had battalion guns of their own that had not been detached.

Artillerymen from Hessen-Cassel. As part of its North American contingent, Hessen-Cassel provided "battalion guns," light artillery intended to be attached to, and serve alongside, the musketeer, fusilier, and grenadier regiments in close support. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library

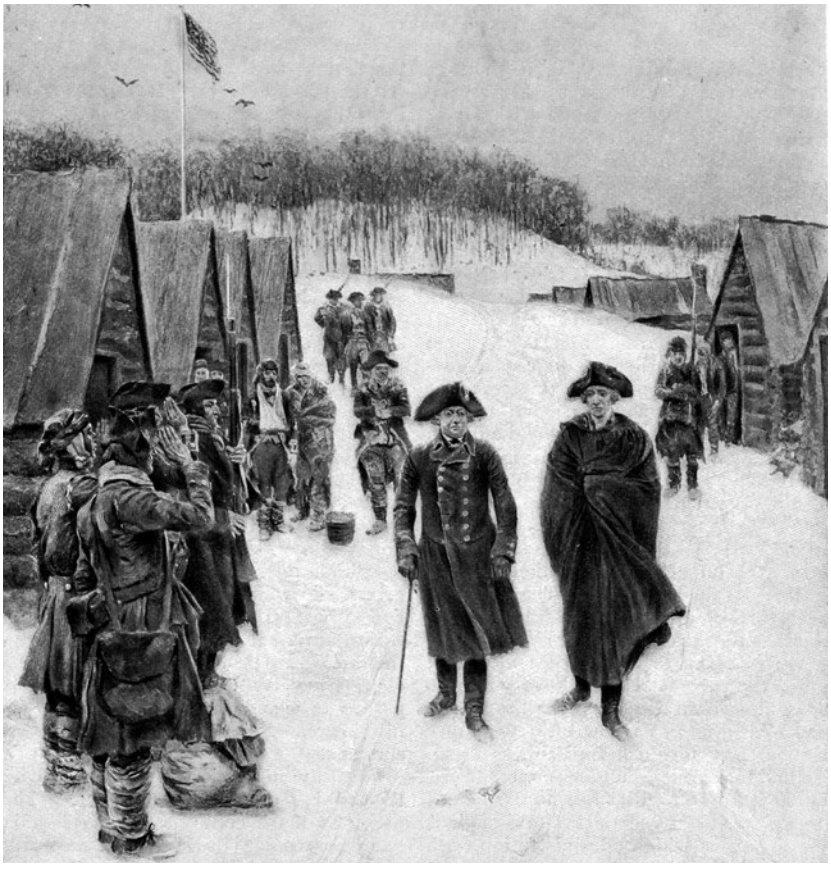
CLOSE COMBAT

Continental

While the Continental Army frequently achieved fire superiority over its foes, it proved far less capable of matching close assaults and aggressive advances until the latter stages of the war. It was well understood that one of the greatest advantages Crown troops possessed – be they British or Hessian – was what many contemporaries referred to as "steadiness." This was the ability to maneuver under fire, but also engage in aggressive advances and assaults. As an army in its infancy, the Continental Army's commanders tended to want to avoid testing their men in such a manner. Conversely, the British sought to close with unsteady Continental troops as rapidly as possible.

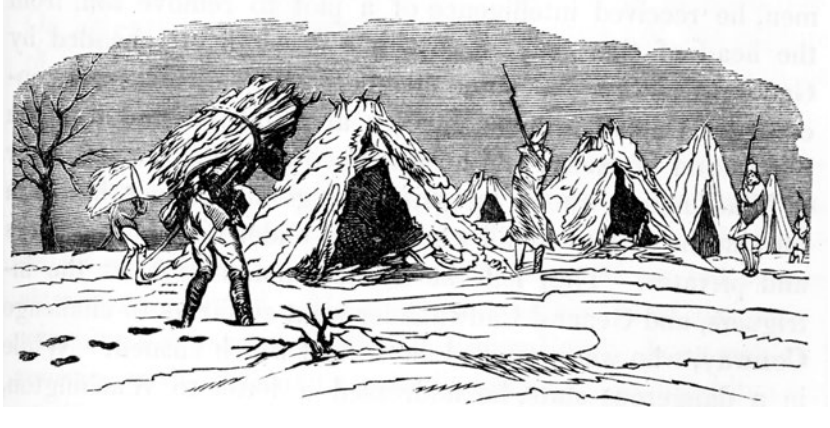
To counteract the tactical aggression of Crown Forces as well as maintain the morale and coherency of their own units, the Continentals tended to act on the tactical as well as the operational defensive, occupying favorable terrain and, where possible, field fortifications. Just as the British had learned the deadly nature of American firepower early in the war, at the battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, so the Patriots hoped to repeat that engagement by digging in and tempting Crown Forces into wasting their already inferior numbers in costly bayonet charges into concentrated firepower.

A veteran of the Seven Years' War, Horatio Lloyd Gates was appointed Adjutant General of the Continental Army on June 17, 1775. His experience in military administration was important in the early years of the Continental Army, and he went on to oversee the vital American victory at Saratoga on October 7, 1777, though he suffered a crushing defeat in South Carolina at the battle of Camden on August 16, 1780. (Billy Hathorn/Wikimedia/ CC0 1.0)



Continental forces in winter cantonments. The winter months were difficult for all armies in North America, though the Continentals suffered in particular following their eviction from New York in 1776 and Philadelphia in 1777. (Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo)

Washington proved to have a near-obsession with defensive warfare during the New York campaign – his troops dug in on Long Island, only to be outflanked and routed. They did the same around New York City, were again outflanked at Kip's Bay, and withdrew to new defensive lines at Harlem Heights. When these defenses were again outflanked, Washington retreated again to new defenses prepared above White Plains. When the loss of Chatterton Hill again risked exposing Washington's flank, he retreated to more defenses farther north. On each occasion, the Continentals threw



A winter encampment. During the coldest months log cabins were constructed by soldiers from both sides, but in extremis, simple huts had to do. Foraging for supplies, particularly timber for huts and wood for fires, became vital activities and frequently led to skirmishing. (Ivy Close Images/Alamy Stock Photo)

up breastworks and redoubts on elevated ground, but Crown commanders declined to attack, and ultimately succeeded in forcing the abandonment of Patriot positions through maneuver and limited attacks. Ultimately, at the campaign's culmination, Crown Forces – led by the Hessians – were still able to storm prepared Continental defensive positions at Fort Washington while suffering relatively modest casualties.

The British belief at the beginning of the conflict that the Patriots would "melt away" when confronted by professional soldiers was soon found to be misplaced, but the basic premise that Continental forces were unaccustomed and therefore uncomfortable acting on the offensive, while Crown troops were not, remained true. British and Hessian tactical doctrine of the war focused on rapid movement, usually culminating in a bayonet charge conducted from a distance of about 100yd. These tactics provided the pattern for repeated Crown tactical – if not lasting strategic – successes over Continental forces.

At times, the Continentals – and militia – would rally and return to the fight, leading to a situation that proved dangerous for Crown troops left tired and scattered by an assault. In general, however, a bayonet charge was often enough to decide an engagement in the Crown's favor. In the early years of the war, some Continental regiments were not even equipped with bayonets, and were therefore entirely unable to withstand enemy assaults, or launch ones of their own.

This disparity gradually began to change as the war progressed and Continental soldiers grew in confidence. The 1st Maryland Regiment won renown for counterattacking advancing British and Hessian troops during the battle of Long Island, while the battle of Trenton not only saw an operational offensive, but also included bayonet work, with Continental infantry charging Hessian grenadiers and fusiliers on several occasions, capturing their artillery on two occasions, and driving them from the town. Such success was another component of the growing skill and experience of Continental troops. Toward the end of the war, assaults on British and Hessian defensive positions, such as Stony Point and the Yorktown redoubts, were conducted almost exclusively with the bayonet, showing that elements of the Continental Army – in this case, the elite light-infantry battalions – could operate on a par with their enemies.

Hessian

Hessian officers often shared the British disregard for the Patriots' ability to withstand close assaults, and British commanders encouraged the Hessians to employ the same shock tactics, rather than risk becoming involved in protracted firefights in which Continental regiments had the potential to excel. Crown Forces tactics were best summarized by Colonel Sir Hugh Percy, who wrote: "the troops should receive the rebels' first fire, and then rush on them, before they had recovered their arms, with our bayonets" (quoted in Onderdonk 1846: 138).

Like the British, the Hessians found that pressing a determined assault could be sufficient to win an engagement, especially in the early years of the war. At Long Island, White Plains, and Fort Washington, the bayonet was employed. Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall in particular placed great trust

This cartoonish depiction of a Hessian grenadier leans into the stereotype of their being large, burly combatants laden with heavy equipment. While there are a number of inaccuracies, such as the cartridge pouch and sword being worn on the wrong sides of the body, it does give a sense of the load soldiers of the period were sometimes expected to carry. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

in the bayonet, rallying his own grenadiers on several occasions and urging them forward to close quarters. When asked why Rall did not at least partially fortify Trenton, another Hessian officer, Captain Andreas Wiederhold, serving in Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, claimed that Rall scoffed: "let them [the enemy] come, we will go at them with the bayonet" (quoted in Atwood 1980: 89).

Continentals feared the Hessian use of bayonets. After Long Island, Hessian Captain Max O'Reilly wrote that "in short, our Hessians, have thrown them into such terror and fear as can scarcely be believed" (quoted in Atwood 1980: 70). It was not only during major engagements that the Hessians relied on their bayonets either. At the landing at Kip's Bay, for example, a Royal Navy bombardment combined with a joint British and Hessian landing to rout utterly the militia forces opposing them, with the Hessians making notable use of the bayonet. The militia's flight was so precipitous that Washington flew into a rage, and took to beating the runaways vainly with his riding cane before throwing his hat to the ground (Middlekauff 1982: 355). Similarly, at the battle of Short Hills on June 26, 1777, Grenadier-Bataillon von Minnigerode drove superior enemy numbers off at bayonet point, taking a pair of cannon and 60 prisoners and causing militia forces to rout. In these instances the militia might have had in mind stories such as the one that appeared in Patriot periodicals following the battle of Long Island, supposedly from an anonymous British officer:

> The Hessians and our brave Highlanders gave no quarter and it was a fine sight to see with what alacrity they dispatched the rebels with their bayonets, after we had surrounded them so they could not resist. We took care to tell the Hessians that the rebels had resolved to give no quarter – to them in particular, – which made them fight desperately, and put to death all that came into their hands. (Quoted in Onderdonk 1846: 138)

Another invented account had a Hessian declaring, following the battle of Paoli on September 20, 1777 (at which no Hessians were actually present): "we killed three hundred of the rebels with the bayonet; I stuck them myself like so many pigs – one after another – till the blood ran out of the touchhole of my musket" (quoted in Ellet 1819: 161). Such lurid tales were a feature throughout the war, and while undoubtedly calculated to bolster the Patriot cause throughout propaganda, they also reflected fears of Hessian barbarism, usually tied to their aggressive mode of fighting. Sometimes it seems such fears were not wholly unsubstantiated – one Royal Navy midshipman, Bartholomew James, having gone ashore in the immediate aftermath of the contested landing at Kip's Bay, recalled seeing a Hessian cut off a dead militiaman's head and plant it on top of a pole in the captured entrenchments (McCullough 2005: 211).

The brutalities of war aside, Hessian bayonets wreaked fear among unsteady troops, especially the militia, for most of the war, though they lost much of their terror toward the Continentals after the battles of Trenton and Red Bank, when repeated Hessian bayonet charges by some of their best troops were overcome by concentrated Continental firepower. Hessian elan was rarely found lacking, but it was not a guarantee of victory.

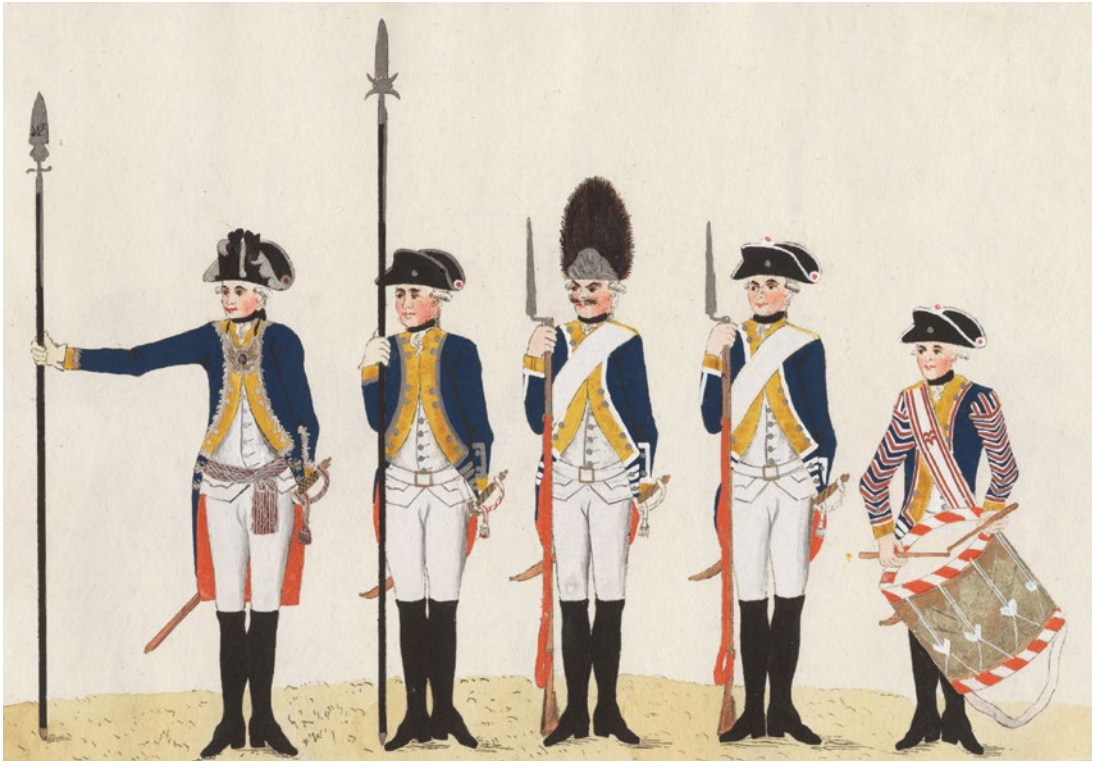
White Plains

October 28, 1776

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

On August 27, 1776, following a major military concentration, Lieutenant-General Howe defeated Continental forces at the battle of Long Island, initiating a three-month campaign around New York City and its environs. Following this opening defeat, Washington successful evacuated his forces to York Island (modern-day Manhattan). An attempt by Howe to cut off the Continental Army on York Island via a contested amphibious landing at Kip's Bay narrowly failed, and Washington was able to retreat once more to the heights along the north of the island.

On September 21, 1776, six days after New York City was evacuated by the Continental Army and returned to British control, over one-fifth of the city was consumed by an unexplained conflagration. Revolutionary arsonists were blamed. This depiction is by Franz Xaver Habermann (1721–96). (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)



Füsilier-Regiment von Ditfurth saw action at White Plains and Rhode Island, as well as the British siege of Charleston in 1780. In 1782, Ditfurth became a *Musketier* regiment, as shown in this 1784 depiction. The white lapel edging shown here does not appear to have been worn in North America. (Buyenlarge/Contributor/Getty Images)

OPPOSITE
A 1777 map showing the complex maneuvers of Howe's and Washington's armies around New York during the campaign of August–November 1776. The engagement at White Plains, close to the map's most northerly part, was the first time that Hessian forces acted as the main attacking force against the Continental Army in a pitched battle. (Library of Congress)

With memories of the losses at Bunker Hill the year before still fresh in his mind, Howe eschewed attacking Washington's prepared defenses head-on. Following a skirmish at Harlem Heights in which the Continentals were left – however briefly – as masters of the field, Howe attempted to shift his forces across the East River and march them north, to cut off Washington at the northern end of York Island. The first attempted crossing at Throgs Neck failed, but the second, at Pell's Point, was more successful. Howe established camp at New Rochelle, with forces probing as far north as Mamaroneck. On October 22 his troops were supplemented by the second division of the corps from Hessen-Cassel, commanded by Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen.

Washington learned of the Crown Forces' encircling maneuver and abandoned his defensive works on the north of York Island, except for Fort Washington, which he left garrisoned. Beginning on the evening of October 20, he marched the rest of the Continental Army north, out of the trap, concentrating at the supply depot located at the crossroads of White Plains, about 14 miles north of the terminus of York Island. Again, the Continentals began to throw up earthworks on the hills overlooking their new base, hoping to leave Howe with no choice other than to commit to a costly frontal assault.

Howe's army continued its ponderous war of maneuver, narrowly failing to catch one Continental column still on the march to White Plains on October 24. Howe spent three days at the settlement of Scarsdale before dispatching his army farther north, toward White Plains, planning on meeting Washington and finding a means to eject him from his defensive positions.

A PLAN OF THE
OPERATIONS of the KING'S ARMY
under the Command of
GENERAL Sr. WILLIAM HOWE, K.B.
IN
NEW YORK
AND
EAST NEW JERSEY,
against the AMERICAN FORCES Commanded
By GENERAL WASHINGTON,
From the 12th of October, to the 28th of November 1776.
Wherein is particularly distinguished
THE ENGAGEMENT on the WHITE PLAINS,
the 28th of October.
By CLAUDE JOSEPH SAUTHIER, Engraved by Wm FADEN, 1777.
Scale of Miles.
Published as the Act directs, Feb.y 28th 1777 by W. Faden, Geogr. of St. Martins Lane, Charing Cross.
MANNOR of COURTLAND
Croton River
NORTH-CASTLE DISTRICT
HAVERSTRAW BAY
Haverstraw
Thunder Hill
Parsons Point
Peeks Kill
Weehawk
Weehawk Island
Verdlings
Hook
ORANGE TOWN
TAPPAAN SEA
Ferry Town
Dobbs Ferry
PHILIPSBURG
Philipsburg
MANNOR
WEST CHESTER COUNTY
Paramus
EAST
NEW JERSEY
Schralenburg
Totowa
Passaick River
Hackinsack River
Aquakinunk
Hackinsack
Fort Lee
Fort Constitution
HUDSONS or NORTH RIVER
YORK
ISLAND
Wepperham
New Rochelle
East Chester
Myers Point
Pells Point
WEST CHESTER
Frogs Point
EAST RIVER
LONG ISLAND
Flushing
Whitestown
THE SOUND
Rye
Bedford
White Plains

White Plains, October 28, 1776

MAP KEY

1 0800hrs: The head of the left-hand Crown Forces column, consisting of Rall's Hessian brigade (Grenadier-Regiment Rall, Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, and the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment), engages a Continental delaying force led by Spencer. The Continentals withdraw initially in good order, fighting from behind the stone walls bordering the fields, but discipline begins to break down as they reach the Bronx River.

2 0900hrs: As the main Crown columns continue north and deploy below the heights occupied by Washington's army, Rall's Hessian brigade, on Rall's own initiative, continues to pursue Spencer northwest across the Bronx and attempts to seize Chatterton Hill. The Hessians are repelled by the Continentals already holding it. Rather than retreat back across the Bronx, Rall withdraws southwest, remaining on the west side of the river.

3 1100hrs: Howe deploys the rest of Heister's Hessians – a brigade consisting of Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, Musketier-Regiment Prinz Carl, and Füsilier-Regiment von Ditfurth – along with a brigade of British regulars under Leslie. Donop's Hessian grenadier brigade, composed of grenadiers from *Grenadier-Bataillone* von Block, von Linsing, and von Minnigerode, is also ordered to join this force, but to do so the grenadiers must redeploy from the right flank of the Crown Forces to their left, and do not reach the action in time. As these movements are occurring, Royal Artillery batteries on Fisher Hill open fire on Chatterton Hill, maintaining a steady bombardment throughout the day.

4 1230hrs: Howe orders Heister's brigade to assault Chatterton Hill, but with the ford running high the Hessians pause and attempt to fashion a bridge out of the railings of fences and felled trees. Becoming impatient, Howe orders Leslie's British brigade forward instead. The British ford the river one regiment at a time, but their attacks up the slope are twice repulsed.

5 1300hrs: Heister's Hessian brigade crosses the Bronx, led by Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg. The Hessians' initial assaults up Chatterton Hill are also checked.

6 1500hrs: Rall's brigade attacks Chatteron Hill from the southwest. This, along with renewed attacks by the British and Hessian forces across the Bronx, breaks the defenses of the revolutionary forces. The militia facing Rall flee, leaving the Continental regiments exposed.

7 1530hrs: The Continentals withdraw along the hilltop in good order, covered initially by Smallwood's 1st Maryland Regiment and then by Haslet's 1st Delaware Regiment.

8 1600hrs: Webb's 19th Continental Regiment holds off a British effort to cut off Chatterton Hill. The rest of the Continental and militia defenders withdraw successfully and rejoin Washington's main army in its defensive works to the northeast.

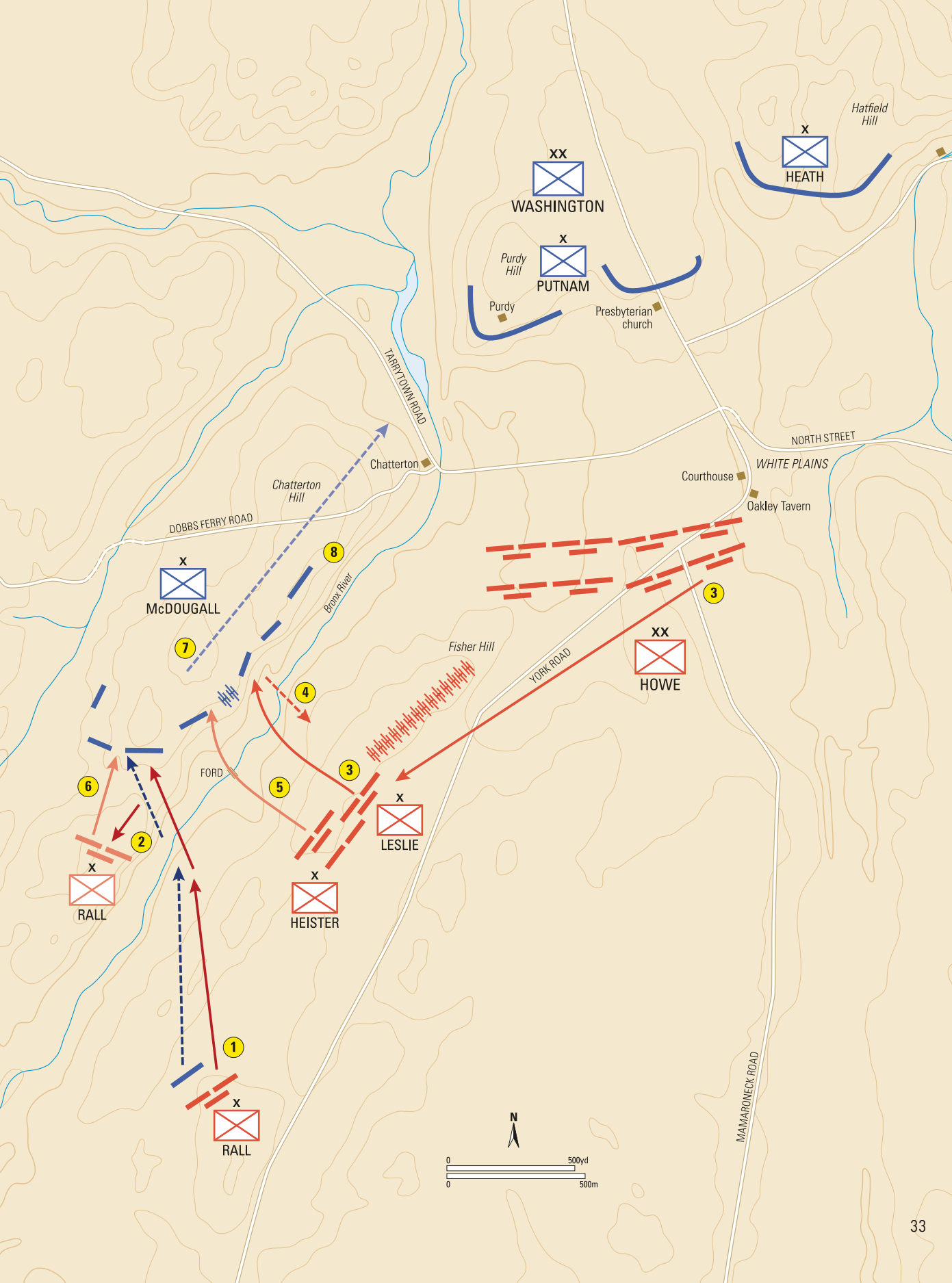
Battlefield environment

White Plains was a strategically valuable region north of York Island, acting as a confluence of roads leading south to New York City, north along the Hudson River, east to Connecticut, and west to New Jersey. The roadside was dotted with houses and buildings, including a tavern, a courthouse, and a Presbyterian church. The terrain was described by Hessian Captain Johann Ewald as being covered in hills, woods, and marshes, with the fields enclosed by stone walls (Ewald 1979: 12). North of the crossroads were a series of heights along which Washington built two rows of defensive works, anchored on his left flank by Merritt Hill and on his right by the Bronx River and, just across it, Chatterton Hill.

Owing to recent rainfall the Bronx River was 40ft wide and running high at the time of the battle. The ground around it was marshy, but it was still fordable at several points. The primary crossing point between the hill and the main Continental line was a bridge at the hamlet of Chatterton, which was the only easy point of reinforcement and withdrawal for the Continentals on Chatterton Hill. The ground around the Bronx was marshy, but it was still fordable at several points other than the bridge.

Chatterton Hill was more of a short ridge, running southeast to northwest and terminating about a half-mile to the southwest of where the main Continental defensive line began on Purdy Hill, on the other side of the Bronx. Chatterton Hill rose steeply just west of the Bronx, cresting 180ft above the river. Most of the hill's slopes were covered with hardwood forest, but the top was cultivated with cornfields (Atkinson 2019: 445). Owing to the angle of the hill, an approach toward the main Continental lines to the north would risk being enfiladed by Chatterton Hill to the west, but its positioning also left it potentially isolated on the extreme right flank of the Continental positions, largely beyond the range of supporting artillery fire from Purdy Hill.

Washington appears to have been aware of this possible threat, but seemingly anticipated that his main line would be the focus of Howe's attack, rather than his right flank. For his own part, Howe did not appear at first to intend Chatterton Hill to be a focal point for his offensive either, but escalating combat throughout the day made that flank the center of the engagement.


Hatfield Hill
XX
WASHINGTON
X
HEATH
X
PUTNAM
Purdy Hill
Purdy
Presbyterian church
TARRYTOWN ROAD
NORTH STREET
Chatterton
Courthouse
WHITE PLAINS
Oakley Tavern
Chatterton Hill
DOBBS FERRY ROAD
X
McDOUGALL
8
Bronx River
7
Fisher Hill
YORK ROAD
3
XX
HOWE
4
FORD
6
5
3
X
LESLIE
2
X
RALL
X
HEISTER
1
X
RALL
MAMARONECK ROAD
N
0
500yd
0
500m

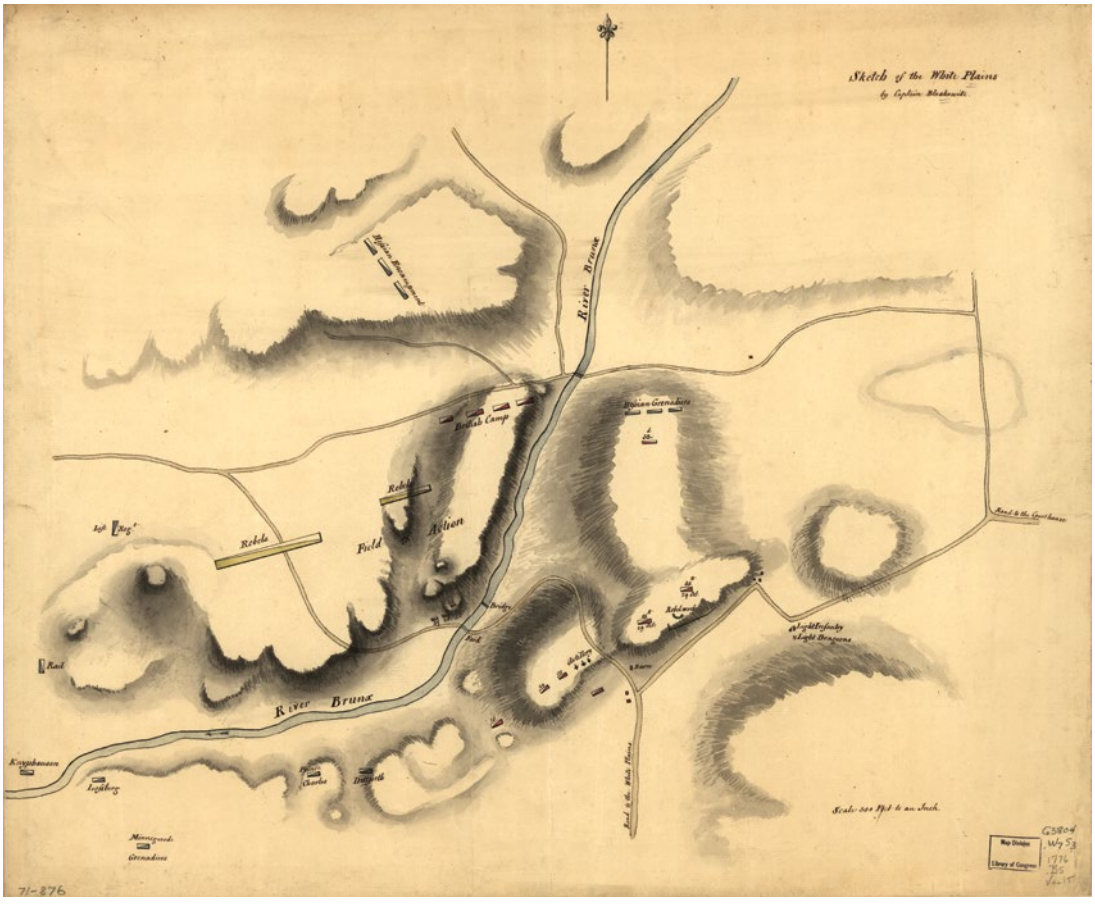
INTO COMBAT

The Crown Forces set out from their camp at Scarsdale at about 0600hrs on October 28, and marched north toward White Plains in two columns, the right following the Mamaroneck road and the left the Fenimore/York road. The right-hand column, commanded by Major-General Henry Clinton, consisted of: a company of Hessian *Jäger*; half of the 16th Light Dragoons; the 1st and 2nd composite light-infantry battalions; *Grenadier-Bataillone* von Block, von Linsing, and von Minnigerode, commanded by Colonel Carl von Donop; four 6-pounder cannon; and the Brigade of Guards, the whole covered by soldiers from the Loyalist Provincial Corps. The left-hand column was commanded by Major-General Leopold Philip von Heister, the commander of the Hessen-Cassel corps in North America and nominally the second-in-command of the entire Crown army under Howe, though Clinton had a dormant commission that would have seen him take command in the event of Howe's death or incapacitation. The column consisted of: a second *Jäger* company; half of the 16th Light Dragoons and the 17th Light Dragoons; the 3rd composite light-infantry battalion; a number of 6- and 12-pounder cannon; the 1st and 2nd brigades of British regulars; and two Hessian brigades, the first consisting of Grenadier-Regiment Rall, Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, and the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment, and the second of Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, Musketier-Regiment Prinz Carl, and Füsilier-Regiment von Ditfurth. This column was also covered by Loyalist Provincial Corps troops. The 71st Regiment of Foot (Fraser's Highlanders) brought up the rear of both columns, guarding the baggage.

Around the same time as the Crown troops marched out of Scarsdale, Washington had ridden toward Chatterton Hill, intending to reconnoiter his right flank. As he was doing so a messenger arrived and informed him that the enemy were approaching and had driven in the pickets. Washington immediately returned to his headquarters at the home of the Purdy family near Purdy Hill, the linchpin of the Continental defensive lines. There he commanded his officers to make a stand, before directing Major General Joseph Spencer, a Seven Years' War veteran, to take his division, roughly 2,600 strong, forward to disrupt and delay the enemy's advance. Spencer's force was composed primarily of Continental infantry regiments from Brigadier General Samuel Holden Parson's brigade and State infantry regiments from Brigadier General James Wadsworth's brigade, all from Connecticut, and supported by a small amount of light cavalry and light artillery.

This force made contact with the left-hand Crown column as it continued north, at about 0800hrs. The Connecticut troops opened fire from behind stone walls, supported by several cannon. Captain Ewald, leading the Hessian *Jäger* in the

Depicted here by Richard Purcell aka Charles Corbutt, Lieutenant-General William Howe appreciated the Hessian regiments under his command, frequently making use of them during his offensive operations, but in 1776 and 1777 he struggled with the Hessian commander, Lieutenant-General Leopold Philip Theodor von Heister, whom he viewed as too old and cautious. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)



A contemporary sketch of the White Plains battlefield after the combat that took place there on October 28, 1776. Chatterton Hill is on the left, hard on the banks of the Bronx River. (Library of Congress)

column's vanguard, related that Heister responded by deploying a battery of artillery in the roadway – probably Hessian battalion guns – and returned fire (Ewald 1979: 12).

The Hessian brigade under Colonel Rall was dispatched to drive aside Spencer's delaying force. The brigade had been known previously in the campaign as the Mirbach Brigade after its commander, Major General Werner von Mirbach, but he had died from a paralytic attack not long after the battle of Long Island. Now commanded by Rall, it consisted of his own Grenadier-Regiment Rall, the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment, and Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen.

According to one Continental officer, Major Benjamin Tallmadge of Wadsworth's Brigade, once the Hessians had "advanced within musket-shot … a full discharge of musketry warned them of their danger. At first they fell back; but, rallying again," drove back Spencer's New Englanders with the bayonet (quoted in Scharf 1886: 436). Seeing that if they stood their ground they would be outflanked by the right-hand Crown column led by Clinton, the Continental and State troops initially made a fighting withdrawal, "taking the opportunity, occasionally, to form behind the stone walls, on the line of his [Spencer's] retreat, and to annoy those who pursued him" (Tallmadge, quoted in Scharf 1886: 436). As they continued northwest toward Chatterton Hill, however, discipline broke down. The right-hand Crown column under

Measuring 77in long, this flintlock is associated with Continental Army veteran Sergeant John Dean. Originally a hunting weapon, it has a lock from a French Modèle 1728 musket. (Heritage Art/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

Clinton had moved to outflank Spencer's forces, and the British 17th Light Dragoons moved up in support of the Hessians. These elements combined with the difficulty of crossing the Bronx ford just below Chatterton Hill resulted in a momentary rout: "A large portion, if not the whole, of the detachment, terror-stricken and without any appearance of order, sought the ford – a shallow portion of the Bronx river … closely pursued by Colonel Rall" (Scharf 1886: 436). Tallmadge had a particularly close escape. He later related how the Connecticut troops

> immediately entered the river and ascended the hill; while I, being in the rear and mounted on horseback, endeavored to hasten the last of our troops, the Hessians being then within musket-shot. When I reached the bank of the river, and was about to enter it, our Chaplain, the Rev. Dr. Trumbull, sprang up, behind me, on my horse, with such force as to carry me, with my accoutrements, together with himself, headlong into the river. This so disconcerted me, that, by the time I reached the opposite bank of the river, the Hessian troops were about to enter it, and considered me their prisoner … They reckoned without their host, since he watched for an opportunity, and escaped, by way of what have been more recently known as "the Mill-lane" and the road to Dobbs's-ferry, conveying to General Washington, at Head-quarters, information of the situation of the troops, on the opposite bank of the river. (Quoted in Scharf 1886: 436)

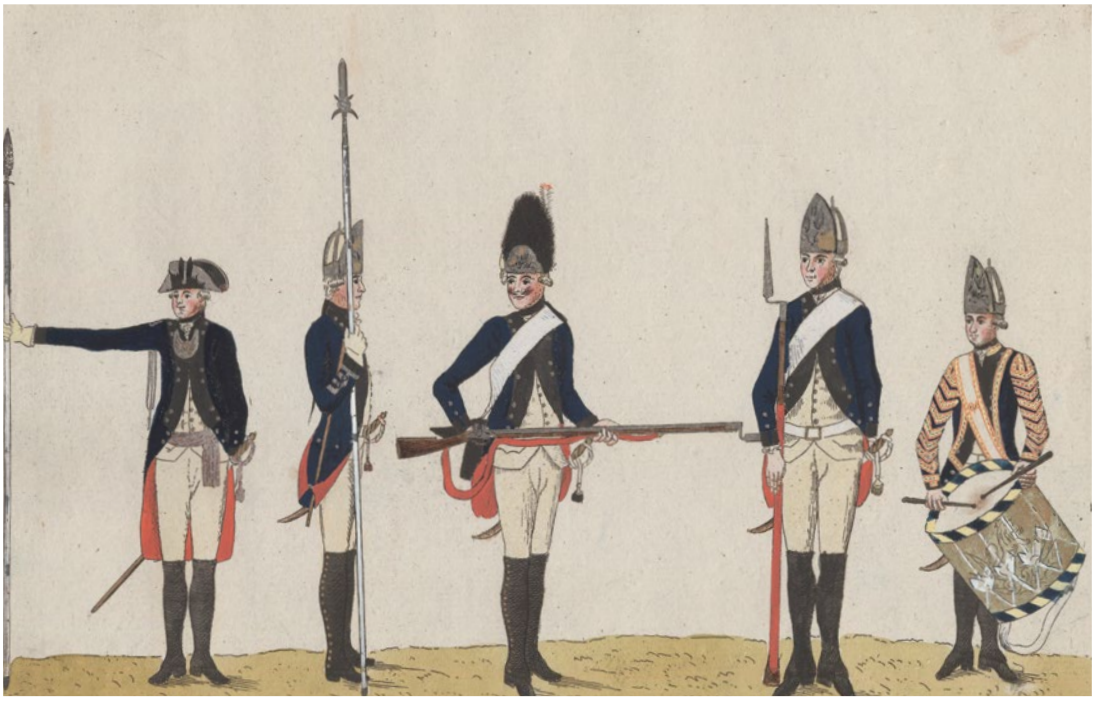
Despite such panicked flight, Spencer's division had done its job, buying Washington time to direct reinforcements toward the militia already holding Chatterton Hill. The first to arrive were the Continentals of Colonel John Haslet's 1st Delaware Regiment, the "Delaware Blues," occupying fences and rudimentary barricades made from cornstalks toward the hill's southern limit.

Rall's brigade forded the river after Spencer's fleeing troops and began to ascend Chatterton Hill, seemingly hoping to capture it on Rall's own initiative. In the event, Haslet's newly arrived men, possibly assisted by those Connecticut troops whom Spencer managed to rally as well as the militia already holding the hill, poured fire down into the advancing Hessians, causing them to break off the chase.

At this point Rall made a decision that was to have a decisive impact on the outcome of the day's action. Rather than fall back across the Bronx River toward the safety of the left-hand Crown column, he withdrew his brigade southwest, risking being cut off in exchange for remaining on the west side of the river, holding a small hill south of Chatterton, close to the settlement of Hart's Corners (DeVillo 2022: 59). Crucially, the Continentals did not attempt to pursue.

The main force of both Crown columns continued farther north, toward Washington's primary defenses overlooking the White Plains crossroads. Troopers of the 16th Light Dragoons reconnoitered east toward Merritt Hill, testing the feasibility of turning the Continental left flank, but a single cannon shot from the defenses sited on the hilltop was enough to disabuse that notion.

Despite considering turning the enemy's left, Howe's focus was drawn to his own left flank. Even if he wished to attack Washington's main line head-on, due to the angle of Chatterton Hill he could not do so without



Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen was first raised in 1684. During the Revolutionary War its *Chef* was Major-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen, who from mid-1777 was also the overall commander of the Hesse-Cassel corps in North America. Engaged at Long Island, White Plains, and Fort Washington, most of the regiment's personnel were captured at Trenton, but remnants fought on at Brandywine and Monmouth Courthouse. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

risking being outflanked and enfiladed on his left by the Patriot troops holding it. Conversely, taking Chatterton Hill might offer the opportunity to perform his own favored tactical gambit, one that Merritt Hill had denied him on his right – turning the enemy's flank.

Howe resolved to storm Chatterton Hill. Heister was given tactical control of the assault, commanding the Hessian brigade – Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, Musketier-Regiment Prinz Carl, and Füsilier-Regiment von Ditfurth – and Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Leslie's 2nd Brigade of British regulars – the 5th, 28th, 35th, and 49th regiments of Foot. As they began to deploy across the Bronx River from Chatterton Hill, Hessian and British artillery batteries set up on a lower eminence opposite the hill opened fire on it. Ewald described Heister's deployment as very slow; ponderousness seems to have been something of a feature of the Hessian commander.

As Heister saw to his dispositions, more Continental reinforcements reached Chatterton Hill. A division commanded by Major General Alexander McDougall, consisting of several New York regiments including Colonel Rudolphus Ritzema's 3d New York Regiment, as well as Colonel Charles Webb's 19th Continental Regiment (from Connecticut) and Colonel William Smallwood's 1st Maryland Regiment, all arrived just in time to stiffen the morale of the Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York militiamen under the overall command of Colonel John Brooks. According to Colonel Haslet, the militia had briefly broken after Hessian cannon fire wounded one man, "which so greatly alarmed his comrades that the entire Regiment broke, and fled, and were not rallied, without much difficulty" (quoted in Scharf 1886: 439). Along with two cannon from the Company of New York Artillery, they occupied Chatterton Hill in the face of the developing Crown Forces attack.

Alexander McDougall

Major General Alexander McDougall commanded the brigades that defended Chatterton Hill during the battle of White Plains. In many ways a self-made man, he exemplified a background familiar to many Continental Army officers.

McDougall was born in 1732 on the Isle of Islay in Scotland, the second son of Ranald and Elizabeth McDougall. The McDougalls were a hard-working but poor family of Presbyterian Highlanders, and when Alexander was six, he and his family emigrated to Britain's American colonies at the encouragement of Captain Lachlan Campbell, a former British Army officer. After refusing to become tenants on Campbell's new American estate, the McDougall family became dairy farmers on Manhattan Island, and made a profitable business selling milk to New Yorkers. Having spent his earliest years in the Inner Hebrides, Alexander took an interest in sailing, and at the age of 14 became part of the crew of a merchant vessel. In the years that followed he developed his own merchant career, including a spell as a British privateer during the Seven Years' War.

McDougall also became a prominent member of the Sons of Liberty in New York, and spent time in jail for writings that were considered seditious. He was nominated to Congress in 1775 and took a commission in the Continental Army, playing an important role in the recruitment of the 1st New York Regiment. He also contributed toward efforts to establish a Continental Navy. During the invasion of Canada in late 1775, one of his sons was killed and another taken prisoner. It was McDougall who, at Washington's command, organized the crucial evacuation of Continental troops off Long Island following the British victory there on August 27, 1776.

After the New York campaign, McDougall was given command of the garrison of the vital fortifications at West Point. He held this position for most of the rest of the war. At its close he continued in politics, but his health declined rapidly, in part due to the physical hardship he had endured during his military service. He died on June 10, 1786, three years after the end of the Revolutionary War.

Born in the Scottish Inner Hebrides in 1732, Alexander McDougall emigrated with his family to North America while he was still a child. Having grown up around ships and seafaring, he became a merchant and privateer. A proponent of American independence, in the early years of the Revolutionary War he assisted with the formation of the Continental Navy while also serving in the Continental Army. At the battle of White Plains, he commanded a brigade. (H.B. Hall/NYPL/Wikimedia/ Public Domain)

At 1100hrs the assault had still not begun. Heister's Hessian brigade was hesitating, seemingly concerned by how fast and high-flowing the Bronx was. Hessian engineers were directing efforts to cut down trees and remove rail fences from nearby in an attempt to fashion a makeshift bridge. To make matters worse, Donop's Hessian grenadiers had been ordered to join the assault force, but showed no sign of arriving anytime soon. The grenadiers were with the right-hand column on the opposite flank, and were required to traverse the ground across the length of White Plains to reach Heister's force. Ewald's *Jäger* were assigned to lead them, and he related the difficulties of traversing marshes and ravines while encountering skirmishing Continental riflemen, all the while under bombardment from Continental artillery along the main line of Washington's defenses (Ewald 1979: 13). Ultimately, the Hessian grenadiers did not arrive in time to participate in the attack – on this occasion their slowness getting into action seems not to have been due to their measured pace, but to the distance and difficulty of the ground that needed to be traversed.

Howe became impatient with Heister's prevarication and authorized Leslie's brigade to lead the attack instead. Around noon the British regulars began to cross the ford, taunting the Hessians as they passed them. The 28th and 35th regiments of Foot were the first across, followed by the 5th and 49th. They formed successfully on the opposite bank and marched briefly along a track later known as Mill Lane that ran between the Bronx and the slopes of Chatterton Hill, before attacking up the slope in good order.

The two Continental field guns on the hilltop had avoided engaging in counterbattery fire, and one was moved to support Haslet's Delaware troops, with the colonel himself seemingly helping to drag the gun. Before the

Leopold Philip Theodor von Heister

An experienced professional soldier, Major-General Leopold Philip Theodor von Heister was the senior commander of the Hessen-Cassel corps deployed to North America in 1776 to aid the British Crown. Heister's difficulties give an example of the worst aspects of the Hessian experience in North America, while showing few of the positives.

Heister was born on April 4, 1716, in Homberg, in the German state of Hessen-Cassel. After taking a commission in the Hessian Army, he was permitted to resign it and serve with the French during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48). At the battle of Braunau on May 4, 1743, he was shot in the leg and taken prisoner. Following the war he returned to the Hessian service, and during the Seven Years' War, led the prestigious Guard Cavalry Regiment in numerous engagements. He was wounded at the battles of Hastenbeck, Krefeld, and Bergen, and at the war's close was promoted to the rank of major general (Poten 1881: 493–94).

In 1776, at the age of 60, Heister was given command of the Hessian corps assigned to assist the British in North America, on the condition that the Landgraf pay off his debts and provide for his wife and children. He was generally well-liked by his troops, and viewed as a tough and competent commander, a view shared by senior Hessian colonels such as Friedrich von Lossberg (Atwood 1980: 109). He quickly earned a reputation for sluggishness and indecision in the field, however, and his relationships with British officers, particularly his superior, Lieutenant General William Howe, rapidly deteriorated. Howe preferred Heister's more decisive subordinate, Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen. The Landgraf later admitted that Heister had only received overall command of the Hessian corps because there were four other senior officers between Heister and Knyphausen, and he therefore could not give command to Knyphausen without upsetting the order of Hessen-Cassel's senior army leadership.

Despite attempts to influence Heister's slow decision-making with Knyphausen's prompting, matters between Howe and Heister did not improve. Heister's lethargy at White Plains saw Knyphausen given command of the assault on Fort Washington, and Heister was later blamed, at least indirectly, for the defeat at Trenton. He was finally recalled to Hessen-Cassel on June 23, 1777, under pretense of ill health. That winter he fell ill from an inflammation of the lungs, and died on November 19, just over a month after returning home.

assault went in, however, a Hessian artillery round hit the Continental gun, scattering its ammunition and starting a fire amid the debris (Scharf 1886: 441). Hessian artillery fire seems to have been particularly effective, more so on this occasion than that of the Royal Artillery supporting them. Hessian gunners likely accounted for the majority of rebel casualties throughout the day's fighting, and various sources speak of the horrific injuries the bombardment inflicted.

The guns went briefly silent as the British infantry attacked into the fire of the Continental regiments and their supporting militia, and for a while it looked as though they would carry the hilltop. An unnamed officer in the lead was, however, seen to pause to fire his fusil rather than maintaining the advance. His men around him did likewise, and the attack lost momentum. Just as had occurred during the battle of Bunker Hill the year before, the British assault faltered under superior American firepower, and Leslie's brigade was forced to retreat.

With the redcoats failing to make any headway, Heister's Hessians finally got underway at around 1500hrs. Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Franziskus Scheffer, and its company commanders – captains Ernst Altenbockum, Johann Casper Ries, Friedrich Wilhelm von Benning, and Adam Christoph Steding – waded into the Bronx, while the regiment's volunteer skirmishers, its *flanquers*, were deployed ahead. The cornfields and trees on the far side were smoldering, likely due to burning wadding, and the Hessians were advised to carry their cartridge pouches high

to ensure the ammunition contained within did not "cook off," though it seems most had already been ruined by the river. Ries explained how the advancing regiment had to wade across a small river, the soldiers' ammunition getting wet in the process, before being fired upon; moreover, the regiment's left wing had to move through a wood that was on fire, meaning many Hessians burned their feet (Atwood 1980: 75).

Despite these difficulties, Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg advanced against the Continentals on the crest of Chatterton Hill. It was at this point that Rall's brigade struck from the southwest. Led by Rall's own grenadiers, the Hessians drove in the militia and Haslet's Delaware Continentals. Ewald credits the Hessian grenadiers under Rall as providing the decisive blow, attacking the flank with bayonets fixed and without pausing to fire a single shot (Ewald 1979: 13). The militia, already unsteadied by the Hessian artillery fire from across the Bronx, broke and ran.

The routing of the militia precipitated the collapse of the Continental line. Three companies of the 1st Delaware Regiment broke, though the remainder of the regiment, commanded by the hard-fighting Haslet, retained their composure, falling back a short way to take up positions along a fence line atop the hill (Scharf 1886: 442). Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg pressed on up the slope of Chatterton Hill to the cornfields at the crest, overrunning what defenses the Continentals and militia had been able to cobble together.

With the remains of the 1st Delaware Regiment acting as a rearguard, McDougall's Continental division was able to maintain its cohesion and successfully withdraw along the crest of Chatterton Hill, heading northeast. The 19th Continental Regiment was also able to stop a halfhearted effort by the British regulars of Leslie's brigade to drive north on the west side of the Bronx and cut off Chatterton Hill from Purdy's Hill, thus keeping the line of retreat secure. The 1st Delaware Regiment continued to occupy and defend the hill until the two regiments on its left gave way, at which point the Delaware troops also retired (Scharf 1886: 442).

The Hessian and British brigades took full possession of Chatterton Hill. By now there were only about two hours of daylight remaining, and Howe decided against trying to exploit the day's successes. At the battle's close 53 Hessians had been killed or wounded, most from Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg (Atwood 1980: 75). Casualties among the Continentals and the British regulars were, as was so often the case, disputed among the various commanders and commentators, but seem to have been around 300 for the Patriots and 150 for the British.

There was no serious fighting over the next few days as Howe strengthened Chatterton Hill and awaited reinforcements before contemplating a full assault on Washington's lines. On October 30, the weather worsened, however, resulting in a downpour that literally rained off the expected attack. That night, Washington began abandoning his lines and moving to take up new defensive positions farther north. After an initial pursuit, Howe decided against attacking, and instead turned his army back south. His intention was to return to York Island and destroy the Continental forces left behind and encircled there. His foremost target would be Fort Washington.

Fort Washington

November 16, 1776

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

After failing to bring on a more general engagement at the battle of White Plains, Howe shifted his army south. Washington likewise disengaged, and for several weeks the two forces maneuvered and shifted their strength at an unhurried pace.

The efforts of the Crown Forces high command to decide where to strike were aided by the capture of letters from Washington to Congress, describing the poor state of Fort Washington and its defenders, as well as the desertion of a number of Patriot soldiers, including a Continental brigade major, William Demont, who provided detailed descriptions of the defenses to the British (Atkinson 2019: 452).

First raised in 1687, Musketier-Regiment von Donop saw service at Long Island, Fort Washington, Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth Courthouse. It took its name from that of its *Chef*, Major-General Wilhelm Heinrich August von Donop. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

OPPOSITE
A contemporary sketch of the extensive Continental defenses south of Fort Washington, covering the width of Manhattan Island. British and Hessian forces demonstrated against these defenses during the November 16 assault, as a diversion, before breaking through the overextended Continental lines. (Library of Congress)

Conversely, Washington and his commanders struggled to form a coherent response to the developing situation on York Island. Unsure of Howe's intentions, Washington divided his main army across the routes into New Jersey, upper New York, and Connecticut. While wishing to evacuate Fort Washington, he was reassured by Major General Nathanael Greene that the defenses were in no immediate danger and could be easily evacuated if pressed. Minor efforts by British and Hessian forces to test the defenses had been driven off with little loss. The prevailing fear was that Howe would shift his army into New Jersey and on to Philadelphia, rather than target the fort.

In reality, Howe had determined to seize Fort Washington and its strong Continental garrison. From November 12, Crown Forces began to concentrate around the fort – in the north, at King's Bridge, along the heights east of the Harlem River, and south of the fort on York Island, at Harlem Heights. Captain Ewald, ordered to reconnoiter the fort and its outworks by Colonel Donop, reported:

> The fort is situated on a steep hill between the Hudson River and the Harlem Creek, where a single road runs. The terrain has been leveled from the distance of rifle or grapeshot range. The road runs up the hill through a wood which is cut through with rocks and steep ravines, and which has been made completely impassable by many abatis. Several small works lie in the wood on the steepest height in front of the fort, one behind the other, which can fire upon the entire road. (Ewald 1979: 15)

The greatest problem the defenders faced was the fact that they were surrounded by waterways, all of which were more or less under the control of the British. Fort Washington's presence had failed to stop the Royal Navy getting ships up the Hudson River to the west, and flat-bottomed boats and bateaux allowed Crown troops to navigate the Harlem River to the fort's east and Spuyten Duyvil Creek to the north. British experience in amphibious combined-arms operations would play a role in the coming battle.

A further problem with the fort's defenses was that the 3,000 troops left to garrison the area, commanded by a Pennsylvanian Continental officer, Colonel Robert Magaw, were too few in number to man all of the outworks fully, but too numerous when it came to attempting to hold just the fort itself. The extended nature of the outermost redoubts and entrenchments would render their natural strength as defensive positions negligible.

On the afternoon of November 15, Howe invited the fort's commander, Colonel Robert Magaw, to surrender. Believing that Washington would not leave his garrison exposed, Magaw refused to accept Howe's terms. At dawn the next day, concerned about the threat to the fort, Washington and his senior commanders crossed the Hudson from New Jersey to Manhattan Island, landing at Jeffrey's Hook and moving to the nearest of the southernmost Continental defences as the British and Hessian cannonade began. They reached the home of Colonel Roger Morris, a Loyalist who had since fled to Britain. This timber structure overlooked the east side of northern Manhattan and acted as an anchor for the left flank of the three lines of Continental defenses south of the fort. As it turned out, Washington had arrived just in time to witness the start of the Crown Forces assault. He would not stay to see the attack fully develop.

Fort Washington, November 16, 1776

MAP KEY

1 0700hrs: Hessian artillery at the extreme north of Manhattan Island, British artillery on the east bank of the Harlem River, and the Royal Navy fifth-rate frigate HMS *Pearl* in the Hudson River open fire on the Continental defenses. The tide in Spuyten Duyvil Creek holds up the boats intended to ferry Mathew's prong of the Crown assault across the Harlem River, however, delaying the entire operation.

2 1030hrs: Knyphausen begins the Hessian assault from the north. Two columns of 4,000 troops attack the steep, forested, and rocky slopes. Continental troops, mostly the riflemen of Rawlings' Regiment and gunners for the three cannon in the two redoubts, check the Hessian advance.

3 1200hrs: A brigade of Hessians and a brigade of British regulars under the command of Percy move forward to threaten Cadwalader's first line of defensive works. Washington and his senior officers and staff decide to evacuate from their headquarters at the home of Morris and withdraw by boat across the Hudson River.

4 1200hrs: Two battalions of Scottish Highlanders from the 42nd Foot cross the Harlem River and land below the southern edge of Laurel Hill. Continental reserves are sent to check their advance, but they are heavily outnumbered. The Highlanders' attack, initially intended as a diversion, breaks through and starts pushing south toward the Morris estate and the rear of the third Continental defensive line.

5 1300hrs: Percy's brigade storms the first line of Continental defenses south of Fort Washington. The Continental forces there begin to collapse and retreat north toward the fort itself.

6 1300hrs: British light infantry and Guards, supported by grenadiers and the 33rd Foot, cross the Harlem River and storm Laurel Hill. As with the defenses farther south, the overstretched Continental lines collapse.

7 1330hrs: The Hessian assault finally drives back Rawlings' riflemen and storms the two redoubts north of the fort. They carry on after the retreating Continentals, pursuing them to within musket range of Fort Washington.

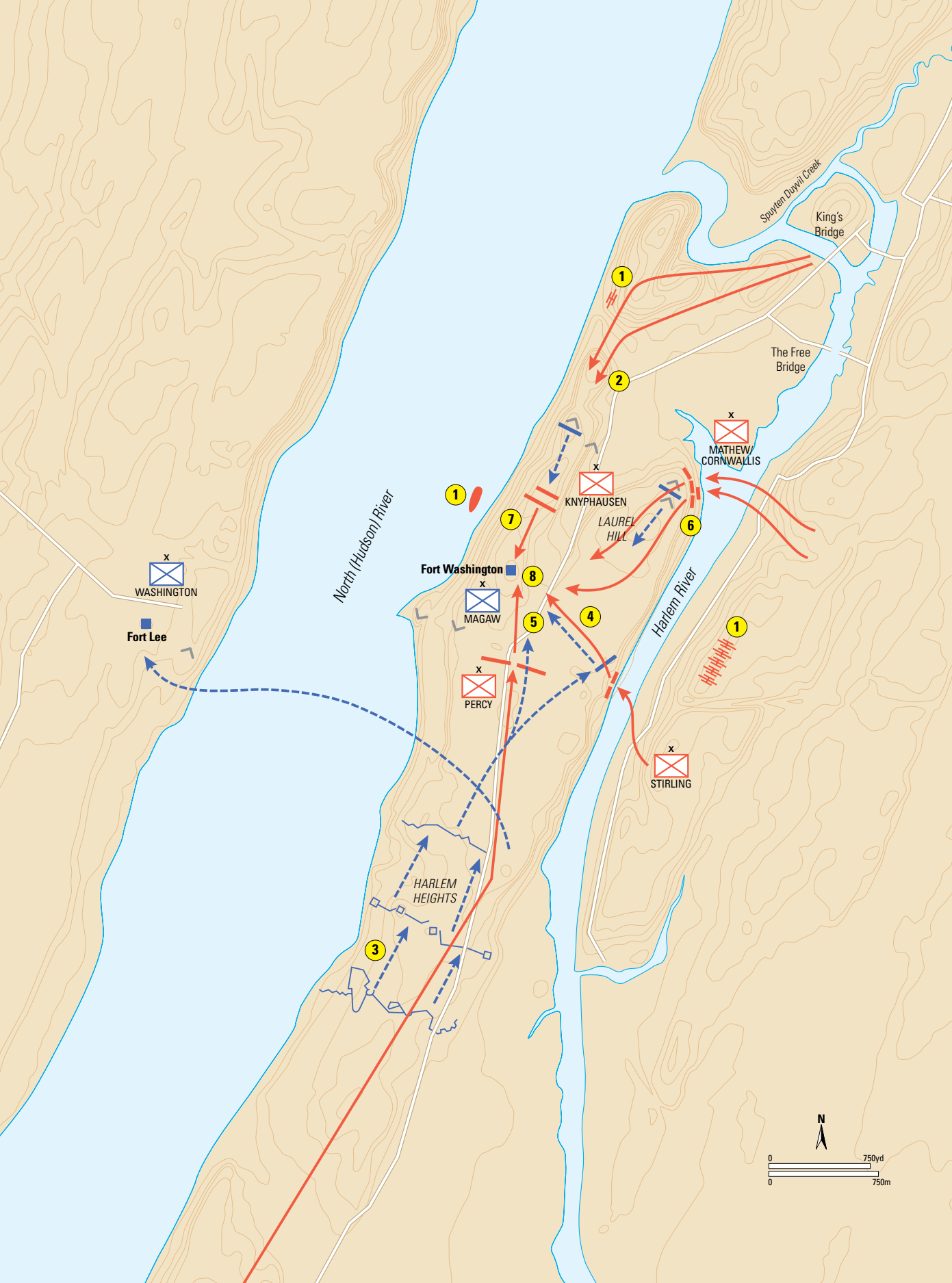
8 1530hrs: Despite having faced the fiercest resistance of the day's fighting, Knyphausen's Hessians are the first Crown troops to reach Fort Washington. Magaw and his garrison capitulate to Knyphausen.

Battlefield environment

Fort Washington was, in parts, a strong defensive position, but suffered from a number of deficiencies that would ultimately undermine it. The fort itself was a relatively simple pentagonal structure with five defensive redoubts, sited on a spur of schist at the highest point on York Island. The ridgeline upon which the fort sat continued a short way north, where it terminated before another small hill and a farther eminence that marked the northernmost tip of the island. Just east of this ridge was another outcrop known as Laurel Hill, with the road from King's Bridge in the north to New York City farther south running between the two. The entire area was steep, rocky, and forested, with the low ground made treacherous by marshland.

To accentuate these natural defenses the Patriots had added further outworks. Two small redoubts with cannons were mounted on the northern and northeastern faces of Laurel Hill, and another two on the northern point of the ridgeline immediately west, covering the road from King's Bridge to New York City. To the south of the fort, an ambitious series of further defenses had been thrown up – three lines of entrenchments and redoubts, though not all had been completed at the time of the battle. The hope was that Crown Forces would dash themselves to pieces in frontal assaults on these lines, and that a Patriot "defense in depth" would inflict casualties akin to the losses suffered by the British at Bunker Hill.

The Morris mansion, once belonging to the British Army's Colonel Roger Morris, was constructed on Manhattan Island in 1765. It served as the Continental Army's headquarters at various points during the New York campaign, including during the battle of Fort Washington, when its grounds were overrun by Scottish Highlanders of the 42nd Foot. It later served as Major-General Knyphausen's headquarters. Today it is the oldest remaining extant house on Manhattan Island. (Author)


Spuyten Duyvil Creek
King's Bridge
The Free Bridge
MATHEW/ CORNWALLIS
KNYPHAUSEN
LAUREL HILL
North (Hudson) River
Fort Washington
MAGAW
PERCY
Harlem River
STIRLING
WASHINGTON
Fort Lee
HARLEM HEIGHTS
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INTO COMBAT

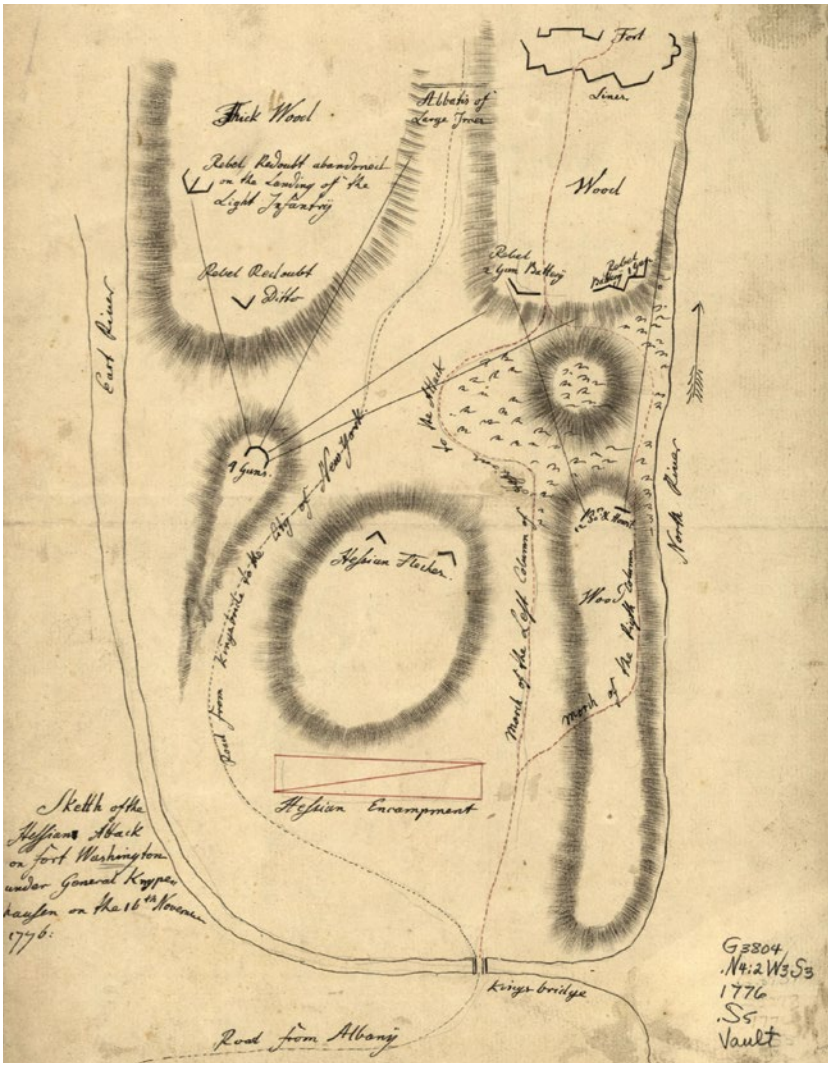
Magaw concentrated the majority of his Continental troops under the command of Colonel Lambert Cadwalader in the three defensive lines south of the fort, anticipating that this would be the site of the primary Crown offensive. To the north, Lieutenant Colonel Moses Rawlings' regiment of riflemen, considered among the best Continental troops available to Washington, joined the artillery crews defending the redoubts and the steep slopes of the ridgeline, while the artillery on Laurel Hill was bolstered by militia under Colonel William Baxter and Colonel Michael Swope.

Magaw and more senior Continental officers had misjudged the direction of the main Crown attack, however. The assault from the north was intended as the primary thrust, and was to be conducted by around 4,000 Hessians. Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen was given command, and organized his offensive into two columns. The rightmost column would adhere to the western side of the island. In its vanguard was a *Jäger* detachment of 20 men and one officer alongside a grenadier detachment of 40 men and one officer, acting as a combined-arms skirmish force intended to clear the way ahead of the column, much as they had done at Flatbush on Long Island. The main body of the column behind consisted of Grenadier-Bataillon Köhler – a composite Hessian grenadier battalion formed from one company of Grenadier-Regiment Rall and the grenadier companies from *Garnisons-Regimenter* von Bünau, von Stein, and von Wissenbach – followed by Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, and finally the Waldeck Regiment, from another of the German states allied to Britain. The two-pronged assault's left-hand column consisted of another vanguard of *Jäger* and grenadiers, followed by Musketier-Regiment von Wutgenau, Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, and *Garnisons-Regimenter* von Huyn and von Bünau. In reserve were *Garnisons-Regimenter* von Stein and von Wissenbach.

While this attack struck southward, secondary and diversionary assaults were launched from other directions. Two separate crossings of the Harlem River would be undertaken, one landing northeast of the fort and to the left of Knyphausen's assault, commanded by Major-General Edward Mathew and Major-General Charles Cornwallis and consisting of a force of *Jäger* and the elite British regiments: the Brigade of Guards; the 1st and 2nd composite light-infantry battalions supported by the 1st and 2nd composite grenadier battalions; and the 33rd Regiment of Foot. Just south of them, another crossing would be carried out by the twin battalions of the 42nd (Royal Highland) Regiment of Foot. Lastly, what was intended to appear to be the main attack was to be carried out from the south against the three lines of Continental defenses, led by Lieutenant-General Hugh Percy. This force consisted of a brigade of British regulars and a Hessian brigade composed of the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment and Füsilier-Regiment Erbprinz.

At 0530hrs, over an hour before dawn, Kynphausen's Hessians and Waldeckers began to cross King's Bridge and Spuyten Duyvil Creek, mostly ferried by boat. They assembled on the opposite bank and waited for the start of the general assault.

At 0700hrs the Crown Forces began their bombardment. In the Hudson, the 32-gun Royal Navy fifth-rate frigate HMS *Pearl* opened fire on Fort

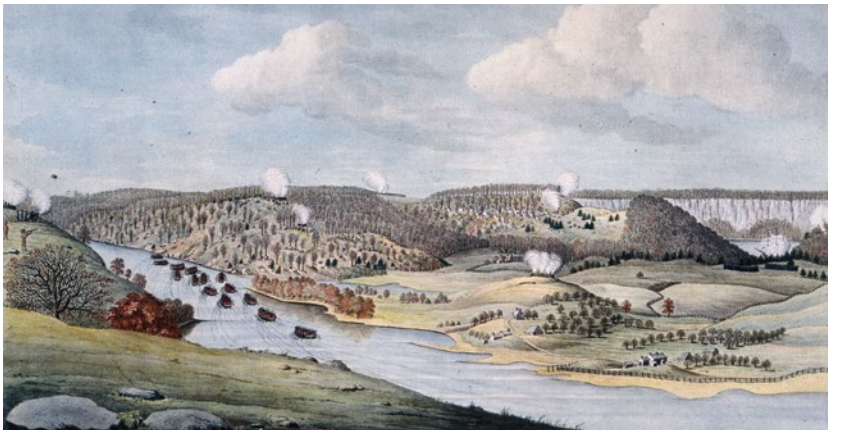


A sketch of the north of Manhattan Island, with Fort Washington at its top (note the image is inverted south–north top-to-bottom). It shows the American defenses on Laurel Hill and the other eminence opposite it, as well as abatis used to block the road to New York. The attack of the two Hessian brigades is indicated on the right, splitting around the promontory beneath the rebel redoubts before converging again to attack them. (Library of Congress)

Washington and the defenses farther north. On the opposite side of York Island, across the Harlem River, Royal Artillery batteries set up in small redoubts constructed facing Laurel Hill began targeting the Continental positions there. Hessian 12-pounder cannon and howitzers newly set up on the northernmost point of Manhattan Island also started bombarding the defenses, as did artillery under Percy's command to the south.

Howe's intention was that the four prongs of his assault would strike in rapid succession, but that would prove not be the case. The British had misjudged the tides of Harlem River and Spuyten Duyvil Creek, and consequently the boats that had been used to ferry Knyphausen's Hessians and Waldeckers onto York Island could not then immediately row into the Harlem River and provide the same service for Mathew's and Cornwallis's corps, intended to attack Laurel Hill. The British were forced to wait for five hours while the tides turned.

The Hessian advance in the north had already started. Captain Andreas Wiederhold stated that the vanguard force of which his grenadier company



A view of the British and Hessian assault on Fort Washington. The artist is watching from the east bank of the Harlem River, looking toward the northern end of Manhattan Island. On the left, British artillery bombards the eminence on the opposite bank, Laurel Hill, while flatboats carrying British light infantry approach the shore under fire from the Continental artillery on the slopes above. At the crest in the center Fort Washington itself is partly visible, while to its right smoke plumes mark where the Hessian assault is attacking the rebel outworks, with supporting fire from Hessian artillery on a hill nearer the foreground. On the far right, the Palisades along the New Jersey shore are visible, along with the Royal Navy fifth-rate frigate HMS *Pearl*. (Fotosearch/Stringer/Getty Images)

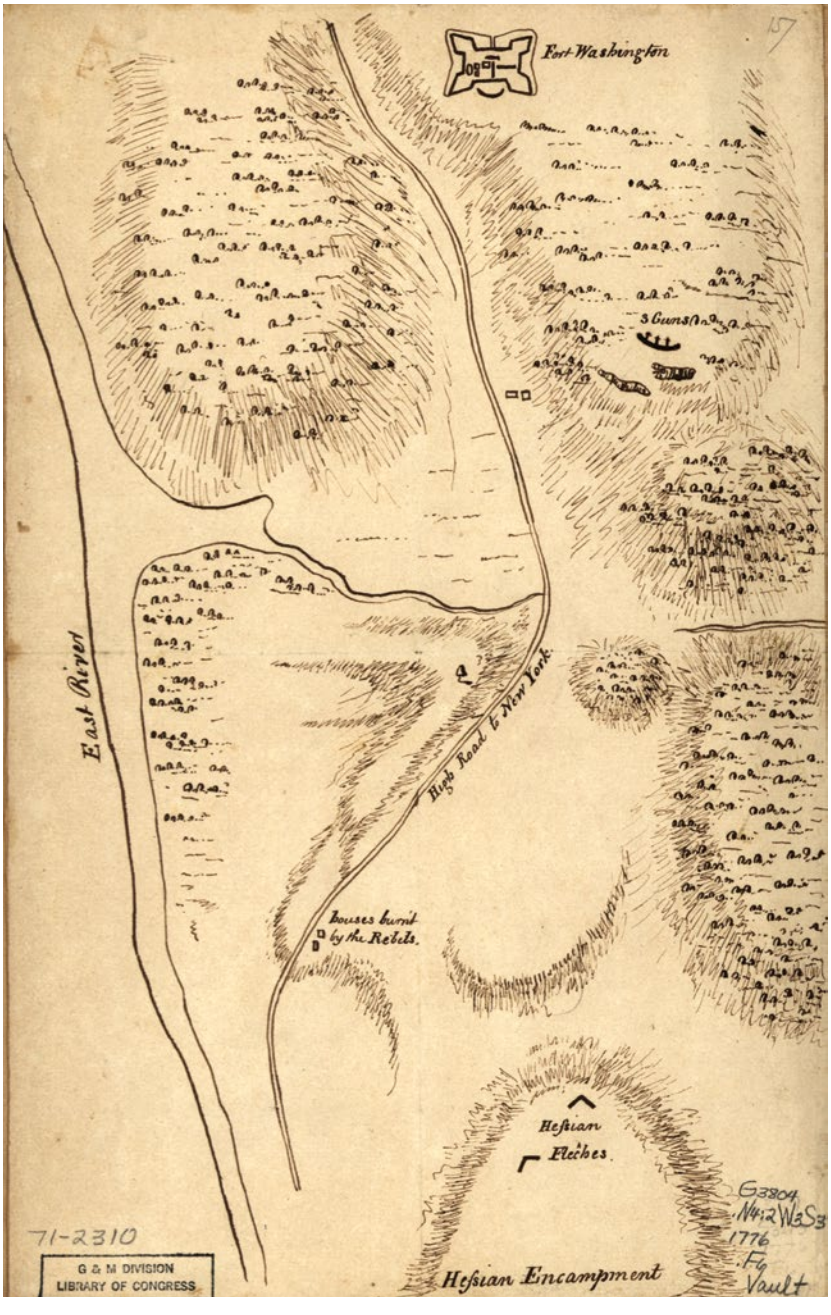
was a part was already halfway up the ridge before being ordered to turn back and wait, writing bitterly that "Gen. Howe had sent word to Gen. Knyphausen that as everything was not ready that was needed for the feigned attack, therefore, they were to delay the real one" (Wiederhold 1899: 96). Another Hessian officer, Quartermaster Carl Bauer, ameliorated this somewhat by commenting that in actuality the Hessian offensive was not fully prepared by this time either, and that the terrain forced a halt until about 1000hrs, by which time a route had been cleared (Bauer 1996: 84).

Knyphausen's columns were consequently forced to wait. Eventually, a little after 1030hrs, it was decided to press the attack regardless of the lack of British support. The Hessians and Waldeckers moved forward beneath the fire of their own artillery and passed around a small hill of rocks and trees, Rall's column on the right, hard on the banks of the Hudson, Major General Martin Schmidt's on the left, closer to the road to New York City.

Though hugely outnumbered, the strength of the Continental positions, and the skill and determination of Rawlings' little force, rapidly became apparent. The 250 riflemen, directed by Rawlings and his second, Major Otho Holland Williams, poured concentrated firepower into the oncoming Hessians as they began to scale the steep slope. The riflemen's resistance was bolstered by three cannon in two redoubts higher up, on the crest of the ridge, as well as several more guns firing from Laurel Hill. The Hessian advance stalled, with regiments either driven back or pinned down amid the rocks and trees. One grenadier from Grenadier-Regiment Rall, Johannes Reuber, remembered the scene vividly:

> All regiments and corps marched forward, up the mountain, over stones and rocks, which tumbled, one man fell down while alive, another was shot dead. We had to pull ourselves up on the wild boxwood bushes and could not stand up properly, finally, however we proceeded to mount the height. Trees and big rocks came down and it was hard to get ahead. (Reuber n.d.: 19)

The Hessians pressed onward. One Continental matross, John Corbin, in the First Company of Pennsylvania Artillery, serving at one of the cannon in the redoubts, was killed by Hessian fire. In a scene later immortalized in American histories his wife, Margaret Corbin, who had been bringing



A contemporary sketch of the terrain north of Fort Washington (note the orientation is inverted, with north at the bottom of the image and south at the top). "East River" on the image's left is the Harlem River, while markings indicate the Hessian position prior to the start of the assault on November 16, 1776, and some of the American defenses they would encounter just north of the fort. (Library of Congress)

forward water for the thirsty gunners, took her husband's place in working the gun, until she in turn was wounded by Hessian gunfire. The efforts of the Continental artillerists and riflemen were successful, for the time being. The Hessian advance was held at bay. Bauer stated that the main Hessian attack began against a cliff covered in vegetation, which they occupied by 1100hrs; beyond the cliff was an outcropping of rocks, upon which the Continental forces had placed cannons. Hit by grapeshot from the Continental artillery, Musketier-Regiment von Wutgenau suffered particularly heavy losses in the Hessian capture of the outcropping (Bauer 1996: 84–85).

Born in Trenton in 1742 to Quaker parents, John Cadwalader became a senior militia commander early in the war. Described by Washington as a military genius, he had the misfortune to command the southern lines of Continental defenses during the battle of Fort Washington. During the attack on Trenton, he successfully crossed the Delaware River with his infantry in support of Washington but, discovering he could not do the same with his artillery, was forced to turn back and played no part in the engagement. (Smithsonian American Art Museum/Wikimedia/Public Domain)

By noon, things were finally in motion elsewhere. Percy's brigades to the south, including the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment and Füsilier-Regiment Erbprinz, had moved up to threaten the first line of Continental defenses. Shortly after, Mathew's prong of the attack was able to link up with the boats that had now been brought on the tide down the Harlem River. The two British light-infantry battalions, supported by the Brigade of Guards, began to ferry over, intending to land at the foot of Laurel Hill and storm it, thus relieving the pressure on the left flank of Knyphausen's stalled advance.

Like Rawlings' position, Laurel Hill was relatively sparsely defended, but the militia and Continentals there unleashed a galling fire on the British as they rowed across. The Royal Navy sailors in at least some of the boats took cover by lying down in the bottoms of the transports, and it fell to the light infantry they were supposed to be carrying over to snatch up the oars and row the rest of the way under fire.

Farther south along the river, the 42nd Foot also made their crossing under the direction of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Stirling. This part of the offensive was intended only as a feint to draw Continental forces from elsewhere and overextend their lines, but the Highlanders found themselves landing on York Island almost unopposed.

Discovering that there were redcoats coming down behind the final defensive line, and with the danger of being cut off from the fort growing by the minute, Cadwalader rushed a small reserve to contest the landing Highlanders before they were able to push any farther inland, checking them on the steep slopes in much the same way Rawlings' riflemen had checked the Hessians. Nevertheless, the superior numbers of the British soon began to tell.

By this point it was already apparent to Washington, based at the Morris estate on the eastern end of the third defensive line, that the fort was close to becoming untenable. Along with other senior Continental officers including Greene – who had argued against the evacuation of Fort Washington – Major General Israel Putnam, and Brigadier General Hugh Mercer, Washington withdrew by boat across the Hudson River to the safety of the Palisades and Fort Lee, on the New Jersey side. From there he continued to watch the engagement play out during the rest of the day.

The Patriot defenses began to collapse. British light infantry swarmed up Laurel Hill, with the Continentals and militia abandoning the redoubts and artillery ahead of them. Stirling's Highlanders likewise broke through and began to swing southwest, toward the Morris estate and the rear of the threefold Continental defensive lines. Pressure from Percy to the south forced the withdrawal of the troops in the first line toward the second. Discovering the Highlanders already in their rear, all three lines were abandoned as Cadwalader's troops flooded back up the slope toward Fort Washington. General Washington himself described the scene in a letter to Congress:

Raised in Hessen-Cassel in 1700, the Leib-Infanterie-Regiment served at White Plains, Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth Court House, Connecticut Farms, and Springfield. In 1783 its title changed to Erbprinz. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

> A body of troops [the 42nd Foot] crossed Harlem River in boats and landed inside the second lines, our troops being then engaged in the first. Col. Cadwalader, who commanded the lines, sent off a detachment to oppose them; but they being overpowered by numbers gave way; upon which Col. Cadwalader ordered his troops to retreat in order to gain the fort. It was done with much confusion. (Washington 1898: 24)

To the northwest, the fighting that had opened the day's action was still raging. Rawlings' riflemen were still holding the two Hessian columns at bay, but their weapons, designed for hunting rather than a protracted, intense firefight, had started to foul up. Some of the riflemen were reduced to hurling rocks down on their attackers. As the fire slowly slackened the Hessians pushed up the slope, urged on by the likes of Rall and Knyphausen. The latter, despite being 60 years old, led from the front, snatching at abatis barring the way up to the redoubts and helping to haul it aside. Wiederhold described how his commanding officer

> could be found in the thickest of the fight, where resistance and attack was the hottest, and he tore down the fences with his own hands to urge the men on. He was also exposed like a common soldier to the frightful cannon and grapeshot, as well as to the rifle shots, and it is wonderful that he came off without being killed or wounded. (Wiederhold 1899: 95–96)

Grenadier Reuber recalled the moment Rall also rallied his regiment in the right-hand column, and the breakthrough was finally achieved: "Major Rall commandeered [sic], that all his Grenadiers, should march forward. The tambours announced 'March.' The Horns blew 'March' and suddenly all that were still alive shouted Hurrah. Then you could see a mixture of Americans and Hessian one among the other, not a shot was fired, all ran forward to the Fort" (Reuber n.d.: 19).

Wiederhold gives a similar account of the struggles faced by the Hessians during the day's fighting:

The Hessian assault on Fort Washington, November 16, 1776

Here we see the height of the Hessian attack on one of the two redoubts located at the edge of the ridgeline running north from Fort Washington. For two hours, two columns of Hessians have been attempting to reach and storm the redoubts, to no avail. Rawlings' riflemen have been maintaining a spirited, accurate fire on the Hessian troops from among the numerous rocks and trees scattered along the steep slope beneath the redoubt, supported by grapeshot from the cannon mounted within the defenses. The Hessians have been pinned down and repeatedly driven back.

Despite this, the assault is now close to achieving a hard-won victory. Soldiers from Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg are intermingled with rifle-armed *Jäger* as they attempt to reach the crest, aided by the fact that the rifles of the Continental troops, unsuited to prolonged combat, have started to foul up, drastically reducing their rate of fire.

Knyphausen himself, despite being 60 years old, has dismounted in order to lead his troops from the front. Disregarding his own safety, he and a more junior officer are helping to haul aside the abatis – a thicket of sharpened sticks and logs – barring the last portion of the slope beneath the redoubt. To his right, two *Jäger*, initially in the vanguard of the assault, are picking off Continental artillerymen, as well as possibly Margaret Corbin, who stepped in to crew the cannon when her husband John was shot and killed, before suffering multiple wounds herself. Nearby, an officer who has taken up one of the company flags of Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen is urging his comrades on.

> We stood facing their crack troops and their riflemen all on this almost inaccessible rock which lay before us, surrounded by swamps and three earthworks, one above the other. In spite of this every obstacle was swept aside, the earthworks broken through, the swamps waded, the precipitous rocks scaled and the riflemen were driven out of their breastworks, from where they had been we gained this terrible height, pursued the enemy who were retreating behind the lines and batteries; routed them there also, took the batteries, one of which lay on the very top of the rock, and we followed the fleeing enemy to the fort proper. There we seated ourselves at the side of the precipitous mountain to protect ourselves from the cannonade from the fort. (Wiederhold 1899: 96–97)

Finally the Hessians swept upward and into the redoubts, bayonets fixed. Rawlings' riflemen fell back before them, headed for the presumed safety of Fort Washington above. Rawlings was among the wounded.

Despite the intensity of the engagement, the Hessians did not pause once they had crested the ridgeline. They carried on along it, chasing the riflemen all the way to within range of Fort Washington. While similar withdrawals and pursuits were occurring all across the northern end of the island, it was Knyphausen's Hessians, specifically Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, who reached the fort first. Indeed, one British officer, Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie, noted in his diary that the Hessians were very frustrated, having suffered substantial casualties during the attack (Atwood 1980: 78). They wanted to carry on immediately and storm the fort at bayonet point, while its defenders were demoralized and disorganized.

Such an attempt was forbidden, however, and Knyphausen sent forward an English-speaking officer, Captain Georg Hohenstein of Grenadier-Bataillon von Köhler, to summon the fort's surrender. A message from Washington across the river had made it through to Magaw asking him to attempt to hold out until darkness, when it was hoped the feat of evacuation that had taken place after the battle of Long Island might be repeated, but it was not to be. Magaw requested four hours to consider the terms, which essentially amounted to complete surrender, but was instead permitted a half hour.

Washington and his staff receiving word from Fort Washington while watching the assault on the defenses across the Hudson River, November 16, 1776. Washington's virtual abandonment of the fort's large garrison was a black mark on his reputation, and the fort's loss was the lowest point of the disastrous New York campaign for the Continental Army. (ClassicStock/Alamy Stock Photo)

It was clear to all within Fort Washington that further resistance would be futile. From having too few men to cover the perimeter of his defensive outworks fully, Magaw now had too many packed within the fleeting safety of the small pentagonal fortification. The Continental troops were hungry, thirsty, and so tightly packed that cannon shots killed and wounded multiple men at a time (Atkinson 2019: 457).

Magaw agreed to surrender. Almost 3,000 men laid down their arms and marched out of Fort Washington between the Hessian soldiers of Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, who had been lined up either side of the gates. The prisoners were roughly handled, their possessions seized and some beaten. Many would perish in the squalid conditions of the British prison hulks to which they were confined.

Hessian casualties during the assault were high, reflecting the fact that they bore the brunt of the day's fighting in the face of fierce resistance from Continental riflemen and artillery. Three officers, one NCO, and 48 privates were killed and 12 officers, 17 NCOs, a drummer, and 245 privates were wounded. Washington's forces suffered 2,818 captured and 53 killed and wounded. British casualties were 19 killed, 102 wounded, and seven missing.

Howe wrote that he was "extremely sensible of the Universal Spirit and Alacrity which evidently animated all the Troops that were Yesterday engaged, and desires his particular thanks may be given to His Excellency Lieut.-Gen. Knyphausen, Maj.-Gen. Schmidt, and the Corps under their command" (Howe 1884: 409). Rall was also singled out for praise "for his Conduct at the Head of the Right Column of Hessians" (Howe 1884: 409–10).

Besides the abandonment and subsequent seizure by the British of Fort Lee, the capture of Fort Washington was the last of the many blows suffered by the Continental Army during the New York campaign of 1776. It seemed to have ended triumphantly for Crown Forces, particularly the Hessians, a fact acknowledged by the British when, six days after Fort Washington's capture, they formally permitted it to be renamed Fort Knyphausen.

Trenton

December 26, 1776

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Following Howe's capture of Fort Washington, the Continental Army concentrated its forces in preparation for a retreat through New Jersey to Pennsylvania ahead of the impending winter. Three days after Fort Washington's fall, Major-General Cornwallis led a force of British and Hessian troops, the latter commanded by Colonel Donop, across the Hudson and up a precarious track along the Palisades to capture Fort Lee. Bar a few stragglers, Continental troops had abandoned the fort mere hours earlier.

What followed was a three-week pursuit across New Jersey, as Washington attempted to outrun Howe's pursuing army. By the time the Patriots reached the relative safety of the Delaware River and crossed over into Pennsylvania, the army of nearly 30,000 men Washington had possessed in August had been reduced to fewer than 10,000, whittled away by repeated defeats, disease, and desertion.

Howe made no serious attempt to pursue Washington into Pennsylvania. Winter had arrived, and the British commander-in-chief in North America had achieved most of his objectives, having captured New York City and all-but destroyed the Continental Army. Howe prepared to occupy northwestern New Jersey, but he had underestimated both Washington and his hardy band of surviving troops.

On December 13, Howe ordered Crown Forces into winter quarters in New York and New Jersey. Brigades and regiments were spread throughout these districts, partly in an effort to garrison them and quell the revolution, but also because the size of the Crown army meant no one town or locale could support it with the food and shelter necessary to subsist over the winter months. While Howe's main army remained in and around New York City, a

Crown Forces crossing the Hudson River and ascending the New Jersey shore, up the cliffs known as the Palisades. The operation, conducted in the dark and in pelting rain, included Hessian troops, and led to the uncontested capture of Fort Lee, one of the last acts of the New York campaign of 1776. (Fotosearch/Stringer/Getty Images)

line of outposts was established running through New Jersey, from the towns of Newbridge, Elizabeth, Perth Amboy, Brunswick, and Princeton, and terminating at Trenton and neighboring Bordentown, on the banks of the Delaware. In total over 16 settlements received garrisons.

As the farthest of the Crown outposts from the main British concentration in New York and, consequently, the closest to Washington's army in Pennsylvania, the Trenton garrison was considered the most at-risk. Donop was placed in command, answering to British Major-General James Grant. Donop himself occupied Bordentown, and assigned Trenton to Colonel Rall and his Grenadier-Regiment Rall, Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, and Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen (it should be noted that, as with many regimental commanders with higher ranks, Lieutenant-General Knyphausen himself was not present with his regiment during this period, which was commanded at Trenton by Major Friedrich von Dechow). Trenton and Bordentown lay 5 miles from one another. Besides a small fort at Maidenhead, the nearest British garrison was at Princeton, 12 miles north of Trenton.

Rall's orders were to patrol the area, keep the lines of communication with Bordentown and Princeton open, and remain vigilant for enemy activity on both banks of the Delaware. While the remnants of the main part of the Continental Army were in Pennsylvania, raiding parties crossed frequently into New Jersey to strike at and harass the outposts. Rall was painfully aware of the extended nature of his positions. Despite this, he refused to comply with Donop's orders to construct redoubts at the approaches into Trenton. He stated that a few point defenses were worthless because he could be attacked from any direction, and his intention was not to try to hold the town itself if he came under attack, but to march out and engage the enemy.

Hard campaigning since August had also taken its toll on the Hessian troops, and Rall may not have wished to add manual labor to the many patrols they were conducting in the first few weeks following the formal end of the campaign season.

The days prior to Christmas 1776 were extremely uncomfortable for the garrison, and not only because of the wintry weather. Raids by Continental troops and militia were commonplace, and both Donop and the local British commanders, Grant and Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Leslie, were dismissive of the exposed nature of Trenton. To make matters worse, Donop pursued a Patriot raiding force from Bordentown to Mount Holly where he remained over Christmas, removing him 18 miles from Trenton and leaving it even more acutely isolated. Rumors circulated of a major impending attack, and much of the garrison was required to remain continuously clothed and armed, ready at a moment's notice to engage the enemy. The state of constant anxiety only worsened the worn-out condition of the three Hessian regiments.

They were right to be concerned. Across the Delaware, Washington had decided to strike. A victory was desperately needed to improve the morale of both Congress and the remnants of the army, especially with enlistment terms ending on December 31 – Washington knew that without tangible success, there was a danger few would choose to reenlist, and the Continental Army would fall apart.

Charles Lee was an Englishman and former British Army officer who, having settled in America and given support to the revolutionaries, was given the rank of major general in the Continental Army in 1775. Though antagonistic toward his superiors, Lee was considered a good commander, and his capture in New Jersey on December 12, 1776, led one Hessian officer, Captain Friedrich von Münchhausen, to comment they had seized "the only rebel general whom we had cause to fear." (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

Washington's plan was audacious, and required the successful movement of multiple divisions converging on Trenton, all after crossing the half-frozen Delaware River. This would be the most large-scale offensive operation yet undertaken by the Continental Army, at a time when their enemies believed them all-but defeated. Surprise was key.

The intention was to strike Trenton from the north and west, securing the high ground above the town and the roads and bridges surrounding it. Thus cut off and attacked from all sides, the garrison would be forced to capitulate before support could arrive from Princeton or Bordentown. Further crossings would be made

by divisions under Colonel Cadwalader and Colonel James Ewing, with the hope that an attack on other Crown outposts could also be attempted, or to provide support for Washington should the initial offensive run into difficulties.

Seven Continental brigades would make the assault, divided into two divisions. The larger of the two, led by Major General Greene, would strike from the northwest, along the Pennington Road. It consisted of the brigades of Stephen, Mercer, Stirling, and Fermoy, supported by seven cannon commanded by Colonel Henry Knox in three batteries. The second division, led by Major General John Sullivan, would approach from the west of the town, and consisted of the brigades of Glover, Sargent, and St. Clair, as well as four batteries totaling nine artillery pieces.

A lawyer prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, John Sullivan was appointed brigadier general in the Continental Army in June 1776. He commanded the vital rearguard action at the battle of Long Island, during which he was captured. Exchanged soon after, he played an important role in the battle of Trenton, where he commanded the secondary assault into the west of end of the town. (NYPL/Public Domain)

Despite later accusations of idleness and false claims that the Hessians were drunk and unprepared following Christmas celebrations, Rall was active in the buildup to the engagement, and his men were largely ready for an attack. On Christmas Day itself, Rall visited his pickets and outposts and, when an unauthorized raid – that Washington feared had robbed him of the element of surprise – made contact in the evening, Rall rushed to the scene of the firing, on the Pennington Road. He ordered the sentinels reinforced and took two companies and a cannon out on patrol, attempting to locate any hint that a more major attack was impending. He detected nothing (Fischer 2004: 205).

Later that night, a storm struck Trenton. The garrison was mistakenly reassured by the blizzard, thinking it meant there was no real possibility of another attack that night. Pickets were permitted into the shelter of nearby buildings and the commander of Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen and the duty officer for the day, Major Dechow, called off that morning's predawn patrol. In reality, however, Washington and his forces had succeeded in making an arduous nighttime journey over the icy Delaware River, and the Continental Army was now closing in.

Trenton, December 26, 1776

MAP KEY

1 0800hrs: Washington's column attacks from the north, driving in Hessian pickets. The pickets are supported by a company from Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg and make a fighting retreat into Trenton. Support also arrives from Hessians guarding the River Road, but this leaves the western route into the town open.

2 0815hrs: Washington's Continentals cut off the Princeton road and take the town's northern edge. Cannons commanded by Knox are set up at the heads of King Street and Queen Street.

3 0815hrs: Sullivan's column approaches Trenton from the west, able to progress along the River Road due to the movement of the Hessian pickets there northward to resist Washington's attack. They initially support Greene's troops forming the right of Washington's column as it envelops the northwest of the town.

4 0820hrs: Rall leads Grenadier-Regiment Rall and part of Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg in a counterattack up King Street, but is driven back by Continental artillery and infantry. Rall has two 3-pounder battalion guns brought up, but the gunners are killed. The Patriots advance and seize the guns. The Hessians are forced into the side streets.

5 0820hrs: Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg attempt to advance up Queen Street but is also driven back by Continental artillery at the street's head. Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen becomes separated from Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg.

6 0820hrs: Sullivan's advance from the west encounters 50 *Jäger* under Gröthausen at the Hermitage, the home of Continental Army officer Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson. The *Jäger* attempt to make a stand there and then at the old barracks building, but are driven back.

7 0830hrs: After a number of Hessians, camp followers, and a detachment of British dragoons escape across it, Sullivan's forces seize control of the Assunpink Creek bridge, cutting off the only route south out of Trenton.

8 0840hrs: Under Rall's command, Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg rally. They counterattack once again along King Street, briefly recapturing their two lost battalion guns, but cannot hold them. Rall is mortally wounded leading his men.

9 0840hrs: Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen heads south, in the wrong direction. Its troops clash with Sullivan's men north of the Assunpink Creek bridge and are driven east along 2nd Street.

10 0845hrs: The remains of Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg retreat to an apple orchard just east of the town. With Continental troops closing in from almost every side, they surrender.

11 0850hrs: Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen is cut off and surrounded just east of the town. Its troops lay down their arms, marking the end of final Hessian resistance.

Battlefield environment

Trenton was first established by Quakers in 1679. By 1776 it consisted of about 100 houses, most of them timber and organized along two parallel streets running north–south: King Street and Queen Street. These formed a "V" shape with the point of the "V" at the northern end of the town, where it met the road from Princeton to the northeast and the road from Pennington to the northwest, while the open top of the "V" was closed off at the southern end of the town at Front Street. Smaller streets ran between King Street and Queen Street and branched off east and west. The town's southwestern side was bounded by the Delaware River, partially frozen at the time, and by the Assunpink Creek, which ran into the Delaware along the town's southern side. The Assunpink Creek bridge offered a crossing point, leading to the Bordentown road heading south. The other primary route into the town was River Road, from the west. A small watercourse, known as Petty's Run, bisected the town. Despite Donop's urgings, Rall had not seen fit to construct redoubts or station artillery at the point of the "V" where King Street and Queen Street met, in the town's north, or in the west at the head of River Road.

Rall's headquarters lay on the western side of King Street, where he had stationed his regiment's two battalion guns, rather than at the head of the street. Other prominent structures in the town included: the courthouse near the southern end of King Street; St. Michael's Church (sometimes called the English Church) and graveyard almost opposite Rall's headquarters; the Presbyterian Church close to where 2nd Street and Queen Street met; the Assunpink Creek bridge and the mill on its far side; an apple orchard just east of the town; and the large stone barracks building on the western edge, just east of Petty's Run and south of the River Road, a structure initially built to house British soldiers following the Seven Years' War.

The weather at the time of the battle was extremely poor, and had a direct impact on the engagement's outcome. As well as helping to keep the Hessians indoors and so reducing how swiftly they reacted to the initial Patriot advances, the intense wind, rain, snow, and sleet – to the backs of the Continentals and blowing into the faces of the Hessians for much of the battle – dampened gunpowder and drastically reduced the reliability of both muskets and cannon. Continental troops were able to get inside the buildings in the north of the town early during the engagement, giving them a chance to prime their weapons properly and fire from dry locations, but the Hessians found no such shelter.

GREENE
SULLIVAN
Belleville
PENNINGTON ROAD
PRINCETON ROAD
CALHOUN'S LANE
RIVER ROAD
MERCER
STEPHEN
STIRLING
FERMOY
KING STREET
QUEEN STREET
Petty's Run
APPLE ORCHARD
Rall's headquarters
LOSSBERG
RALL
St. Michael's Church
Friends meeting house
4TH STREET
3RD STREET
2ND STREET
KNYPHAUSEN
Presbyterian church
ST. CLAIR
Barracks
Steel works
Courthouse
FRONT STREET
Yard's plating mill
Assunpink Creek Bridge
Beatty's Ferry
Delaware River
Assunpink Creek
Mahlon Stacy's mill
SARGENT
Douglass House
BORDENTOWN ROAD
GLOVER
N
0
250yd
0
250m

OPPOSITE
This map of the battle of Trenton was created by a Hessian officer who was present at the battle, Lieutenant Andreas Wiederhold. While some elements of it are crude, it gives a good indication of the salient features of the battleground, notably King Street, Queen Street, and the roads leading into town, as well as the bridge over the Assunpink Creek to the south. (Library of Congress)

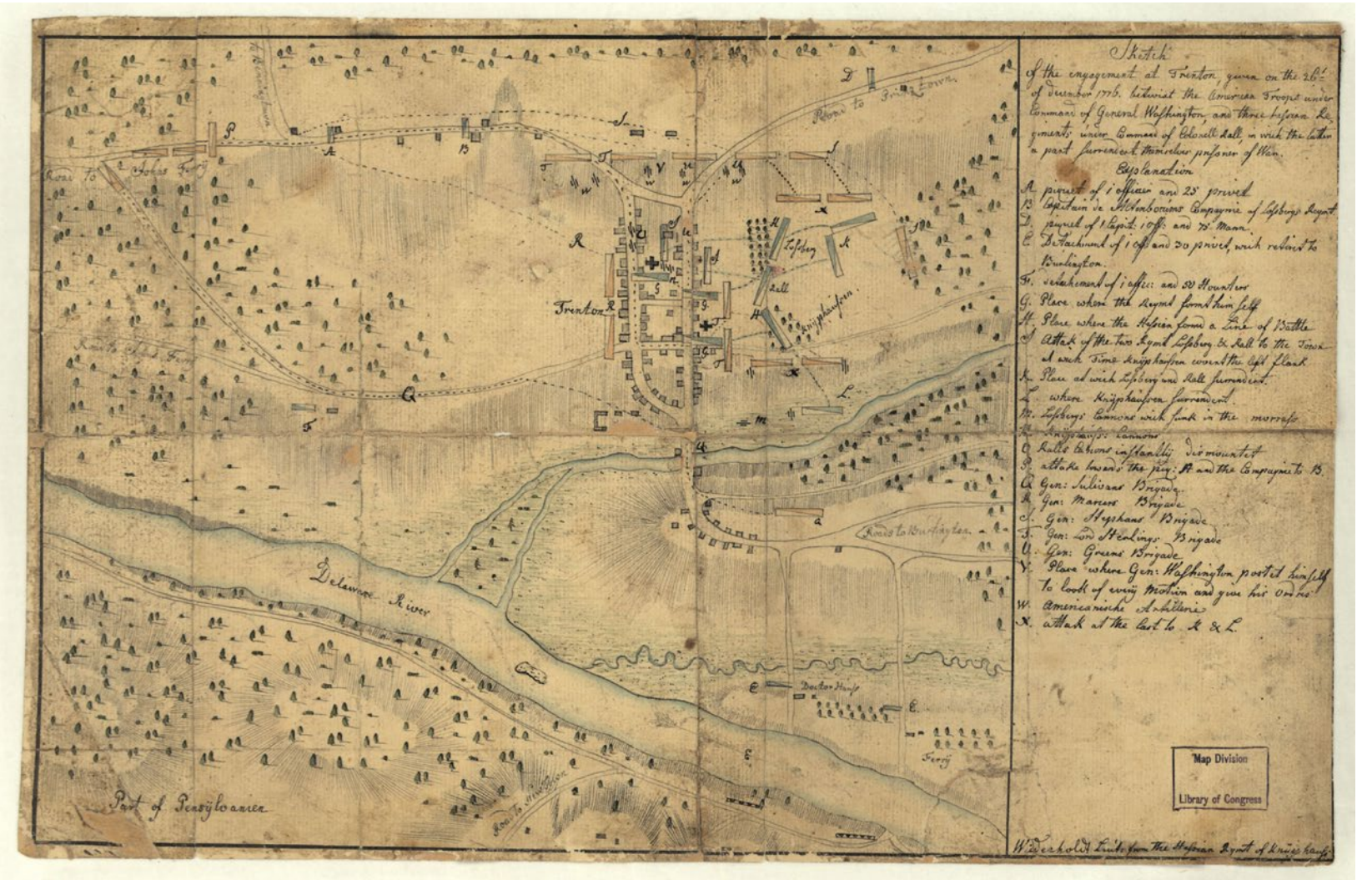
This depiction shows Continental forces landing on the north bank of the Delaware River on the night of December 25/26, 1776, beginning their march on the Hessian garrison in Trenton. Artillery, while difficult to transport across the wide, partially frozen river, proved crucial in the coming engagement. (North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo)

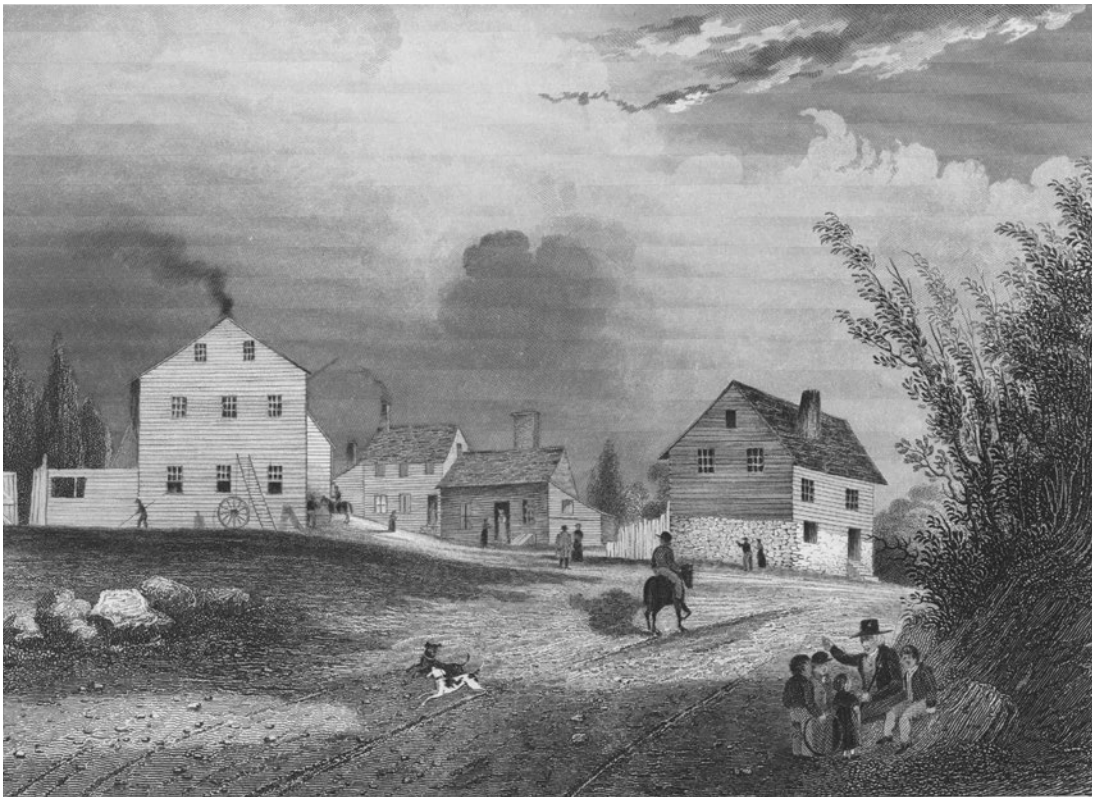
INTO COMBAT

The first members of the Trenton garrison to become aware of Washington's assault, at 0800hrs on December 26, were the soldiers of the picket on the Pennington Road, about 1 mile northwest of the town. The picket's commander, Lieutenant Andreas Wiederhold of Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, had permitted his men to shelter from the storm in the cooper's shop serving as their outpost. Wiederhold himself then spotted the vanguard of Greene and Washington's column bearing down on them, and raised the alarm.

Not yet knowing the strength of the enemy, the picket initially engaged the Continentals before Wiederhold ordered a fighting withdrawal. The Hessians fell back from building to building toward the town as other outposts rushed to assist them. While the retreat was made in good order and bought time for the main force of the garrison to turn out and assemble, a crucial mistake was made – in their haste to assist their comrades to the north, the guards at one of the outposts on the River Road, the main route into Trenton from the west, abandoned their position and headed toward the sound of the guns, thus removing any early warning of the second Continental column, commanded by Sullivan, approaching from the west.

Aided by a duty company from Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, the Hessian outposts slowed the drive down the Pennington Road, but could not stop the Continentals from seizing the northernmost point of the town, including the crucial junction of King Street and Queen Street, or from cutting the town's main means of communication with other Crown Forces, the road to Princeton. After leading the initial assault from the front, Washington retired a short way to the higher ground just north of the town


Sketch
of the engagement at Trenton, given on the 26th of December 1776. between the American Troops under Command of General Washington, and three hessian Regiments under Command of Colonel Rall, in wich the latter a part surrendered themselves prisoner of War.
Explanation
A. picquet of 1 officer and 25 privates
B. Captain de Malbourgeois Company of Lossberg Regt
D. picquet of 1 Capt. 1 Offr and 70 Mann.
E. Detachment of 1 Offr and 20 privates, with retreat to Burlington
F. detachment of 1 officer and 50 Hessians
G. Place where the Regmt formed them self
H. Place where the Hessian formed a Line of Battle
I. Attack of the two Regmt Lossberg & Rall to the Town at wich Time Knyphausen covered the left flank
K. Place at wich Lossberg and Rall surrendered
L. where Knyphausen surrendered
M. Lossbergs Cannons wich sunk in the morass
N. Knyphausens Cannons
O. Ralls Cavalrie instantly dismounted
P. attake towards the pass: R. and the Compagnie to B.
Q. Gen: Sullivans Brigade
R. Gen: Marcers Brigade
S. Gen: Stephans Brigade
T. Gen: Lord Stirlings Brigade
U. Gen: Greens Brigade
V. Place where Gen: Washington posted himself to look of every motion and give his Orders
W. Americanische Artillerie
X. attack at the East to K & L
Trenton
Delaware River
Part of Pensylvania
Map Division
Library of Congress



A later engraving showing the settlement of Trenton much as it appeared in December 1776. Of note are the large timber houses and wide, open roadways, control of which would dictate the outcome of the battle. (NYPL/ Public Domain)

to oversee the engagement. Continental infantry from Stirling's, Mercer's, and Stephen's brigades of Greene's column occupied buildings on the northern end of King Street and Queen Street while, crucially, their artillery were able to set up to dominate the lengths of the two long thoroughfares, with two guns under Captain Alexander Hamilton pointing down King Street and two under Captain Thomas Forrest controlling Queen Street. Knox described the battle's opening:

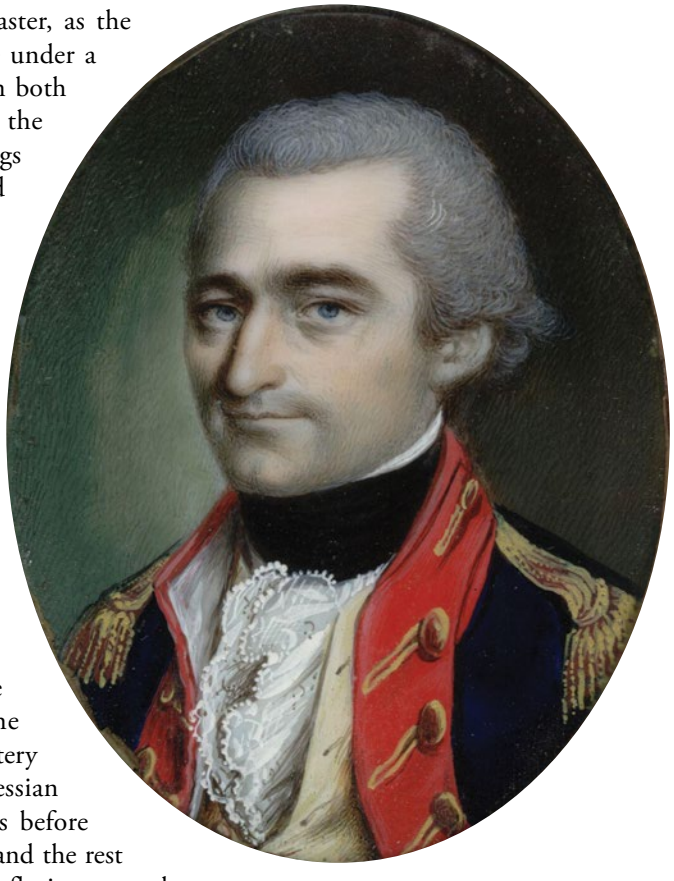
> About half a mile from the town was an advanced guard on each road, consisting of a captain's guard. These we forced, and we entered the town with them pell-mell; and here succeeded a scene of war of which I had often conceived, but never saw before. The hurry, fright, and confusion of the enemy was [not] unlike that which will be when the last trump shall sound. (Knox 1873: 36)

Rall's troops had turned out quickly, Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg assembling near the base of King Street and Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen on Queen Street. They did so under fire from Continental artillery not only to the north, but south of them as well, with batteries located on the far bank of the Delaware mounting a bombardment of the town from across the river.

Rall instructed an immediate counterattack to the north. Grenadier Regiment Rall advanced up King Street and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg up Queen Street, with Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen supporting Lossberg in reserve, though Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen failed to

engage. The counterattack was a disaster, as the Hessian grenadiers and fusiliers came under a hail of musket fire and grapeshot. On both streets the Continentals firing from the windows of the overlooking buildings and the artillery at the far ends forced the Hessians back. Knox later wrote of how "they [the Hessians] endeavored to form in the streets, the heads of which we had previously the possession of with cannons and howitzers; these, in the twinkling of an eye, cleared the streets" (Knox 1873: 36–37).

The Hessians rallied, and Rall ordered his own artillery up. Two 3-pounder battalion guns were brought from outside his headquarters. They opened fire up King Street, but the gunners quickly started to take casualties from the Continental troops firing from the nearest buildings, as well as counterbattery fire from the Patriot guns. The Hessian artillery managed to get off six shots before too many of the gunners were killed, and the rest retreated, abandoning their guns and fleeing toward the Assunpink Creek bridge. Continentals from Mercer's brigade under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Weedon of the 3d Virginia Regiment then pushed down the street and captured the guns. Much the same happened on Queen Street, with the Hessian artillery there quickly knocked out of action.



A leading member of Virginia's revolutionary conventions, Josiah Parker enlisted in the Continental Army early in the war. On February 13, 1776, he was commissioned a major in the 5th Virginia Regiment, and his unit was transferred into the northern theater in time to participate in the battle of Trenton. It was Parker who received the wounded Colonel Rall's surrender, as well as his sword. (SBS Eclectic Images/ Alamy Stock Photo)

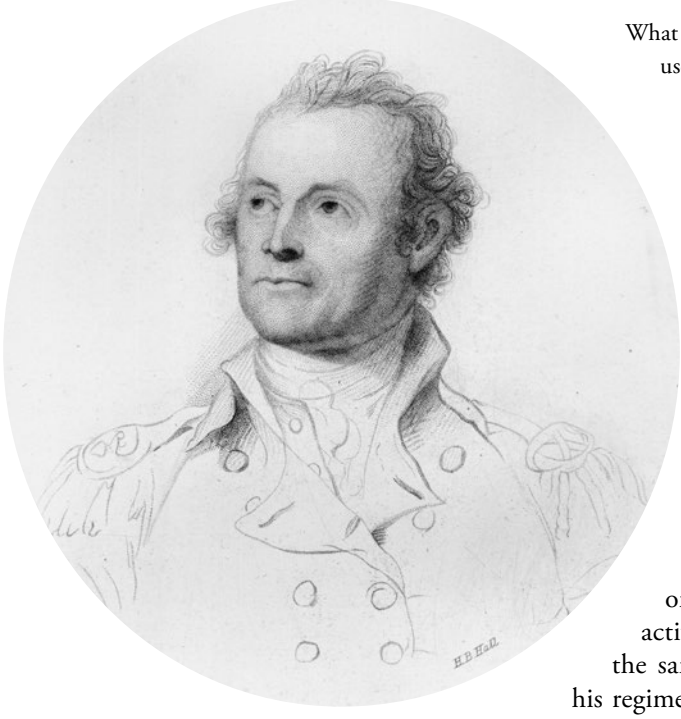
As this was happening, Sullivan's column, approaching from the west, had made contact with Trenton's defenders. A detachment of 50 Hessian *Jäger* commanded by Lieutenant Friedrich von Gröthausen, stationed at the home of Continental officer Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson just to the west of the town, were surprised to find a second column of enemy troops approaching from out of the storm. Gröthausen's men, like Wiederhold's earlier, conducted a fighting withdrawal, attempting to make a stand in the stone barracks building on the town's southwestern edge, but could not stop Sullivan's assault. Eventually they fled across the Assunpink Creek bridge.

Sullivan sent one of his brigades, under Brigadier Arthur St. Clair, to seize the south of the town and attack the Hessians from the rear, while the others, under Colonel Paul Dudley Sargent and Colonel John Glover, secured the bridge over the Assunpink Creek, thus cutting off the possibility of either escape or reinforcement of the garrison from the south. A number of camp followers, some retreating Hessians, including the gunners who had lost so many comrades attempting to maintain their fire along King Street, as well as 20 cavalrymen from the 16th Light Dragoons – the only British

troops present at the battle – escaped toward Bordentown before Sargent's Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York infantry could reach the bridge, but once they did Trenton was left almost completely surrounded.

Rall rallied his grenadiers and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg in a field immediately to the east of Queen Street. He initially intended to march north with drums beating and colors flying, in an effort to seize the higher ground overlooking the town and engage in the open battle he had formerly hoped to conduct. Washington responded to the move by ordering the two regiments he had guarding his left flank and the Princeton Road – Colonel Edward Hand's 1st Pennsylvania Regiment and Colonel Nicholas Haussegger's German Battalion, a Continental unit composed mostly of German immigrants from Pennsylvania – to move forward and in turn threaten the right of the Hessian advance.

Faced with the prospect of being enveloped, Rall instead pushed his two regiments west, back into the town. They did so under intense fire from three sides – not only was the attack continuing from the north and west, but elements of Sullivan's column were now engaging from the south. St. Clair's brigade had made contact, and the artillery they had brought with them now added to the barrage pounding the Hessians from three sides. "During the contest in the streets measures were taken for putting an entire stop to their retreat by posting troops and cannon in such passes and roads as it was possible for them to get away by," noted Knox (Knox 1873: 37). Lieutenant-Colonel Franziskus Scheffer, commanding Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, wrote that as well as suffering the sleet, rain, and snow in their faces rendering their muskets inoperable, to the Hessians it also felt as though it was raining cannonballs and grapeshot (Atwood 1980: 93). Wiederhold recalled despairingly:



John Glover was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1732. Growing up in the nearby port of Marblehead, he became a sailor and merchant who went on to support the revolutionary cause. Elected as lieutenant colonel of the Marblehead militia, his unit was reorganized into the Continental Army as the 14th Continental Regiment, and provided invaluable service manning the boats that evacuated Washington's forces from Long Island in August 1776. They likewise helped row the army across the Delaware River during the assault on Trenton that winter. (Hulton Archive/ Stringer/Getty Images)

> What madness was this! A town that was of no use to us; that but ten or fifteen minutes before he [Rall] had gladly left; that was now filled with three or four thousand enemies, stationed in houses or behind walls and hedges, and a battery of six cannon planted on the main street. And he to think of retaking it with his six or seven hundred men and their bayonets! (Quoted in Irving 1871: 519)

Despite the odds against them, the Hessian grenadiers and fusiliers were able to recapture the two battalion guns they had lost to the Continentals on King Street, encouraged by the ever-active and determined Rall, who used the same words he had employed to rally his regiment during the stalled assault on Fort

Washington: "All who are my grenadiers, forwards!" (quoted in Irving 1871: 519).

The battle had reached a decisive juncture. Seeing the danger if the Hessians were able to re-crew their guns, a mixed force of Continentals was assembled to recapture them in turn. Consisting mostly of Virginian infantry and a crew of New England artillerists from a howitzer the axle of which had broken earlier in the fight, the force was led by the 3d Virginia Regiment's Captain William Washington, a distant cousin of George Washington. Though Captain Washington was wounded in both hands, the hastily assembled force was able to drive the Hessians from their guns and seize them for a second time (Fischer 2004: 247).

While this was happening, Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, in the confusion of the street-to-street fighting, had moved south rather than north to support Rall's other two regiments. The fusiliers clashed with St. Clair's brigade, the New Hampshire Continentals who made up the majority of its regiments driving the Hessians back at bayonet point when the wet weather rendered the guns of the Germans largely inoperable. Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen was forced east along 2nd Street, parallel with the Assunpink Creek just to their south, struggling to re-form while under constant pressure from the enemy. The Hessian regiment had deployed its *flanquer* skirmishers in an attempt to locate a nearby ford over the creek and cover the unit's possible withdrawal over it, but they were overwhelmed by the numbers of Continental troops. The skirmishing platoons were forced back to the main body of the regiment.

Around this time, Rall was struck by two musket balls in the side, wounds that would prove fatal. Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, driven again from their guns and east out of the town, lost heart at the sight of Rall falling. The Hessians attempted to rally in an apple orchard on Trenton's outskirts, but with Continental troops now closing in from almost every side, it was clear further resistance would be in vain.

German-speaking Continentals from Haussegger's battalion came forward and called in their native tongue for the Hessians to ground their arms. The exhausted grenadiers and fusiliers complied. Minutes later and just to the south, Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen was similarly compelled to surrender. Rall spoke briefly to Washington, formally giving his surrender and attempting to secure favorable terms for his men, before he was carried to his former headquarters, the home of a Quaker named Stacy Potts, with whom he had been playing checkers the night before. Rall died on the evening of December 26.

Born in Pitsligo in Scotland in 1726, Hugh Mercer studied medicine at Aberdeen's Marischal College and, during the 1745 Jacobite Rising, served as an assistant surgeon in the army of Charles Edward Stuart ("Bonnie Prince Charlie"). Following the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden on April 16, 1746, Mercer fled to America, where he served under his old enemies during the Seven Years' War. In 1776 he was appointed a colonel in the 3d Virginia Regiment of the Continental Army. He played an important role at the battle of Trenton, where he commanded ones of the most heavily engaged brigades. He was killed a week later at the battle of Princeton. (Hulton Archive/ Stringer/Getty Images)

The capture of the Hessian battalion guns at Trenton, December 26, 1776

Hessian view: This split-screen scene depicts the height of the fighting at Trenton from both the Hessian and Continental perspectives. The combat is raging along King Street, where Continental artillery supported by infantry has already broken one attempted Hessian assault. In response the Hessian commander, Colonel Rall, has ordered two of his own battalion guns brought forward, but it has not taken long for Patriots firing from the windows of buildings along King Street to kill, wound, or drive off the gunners, causing the survivors to flee south and out of the town. A charge by Continental infantry had seized the two guns, but the Hessians have now rallied and counterattacked. A mixture of troops from Grenadier-Regiment Rall and Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg are attempting to hold off the Continentals while re-crewing the guns. A sergeant of Grenadier-Regiment Rall uses his polearm to attempt to dress the ranks and form a proper firing line during the chaotic fighting. Contrary to some popular histories, the Hessians were almost fully prepared once the fighting began, and went into action properly uniformed and equipped. The poor weather meant, however, that muskets and artillery on both sides became more unreliable.

Continental view: In response to the efforts of the Hessian troops retaking their battalion guns, a mixed force of Continental infantry and artillerymen, mostly from the 1st Delaware Regiment and 3d Virginia Regiment, are charging down King Street. To the right, Captain William Washington is being hit by musket fire in his right hand – he soon after receives a wound in his left hand as well. On his left, Lieutenant James Monroe is encouraging his men forward, small sword drawn. Monroe too would be wounded, shot in the upper chest, but both men would survive, and the attack on the guns was successful, capturing them for a second time. Rall himself was mortally wounded soon after, marking the collapse of organized Hessian resistance.

The height of the fighting during the battle of Trenton. A crucial moment was reached when the Hessians brought artillery pieces to bear down King Street and Queen Street. Continental firepower killed or drove off the gunners and allowed the weapons to be captured, but they were retaken by a Hessian counterattack, only to be lost a second time to the determined American assaults. (Niday Picture Library/Alamy Stock Photo)

The Hessians at Trenton suffered 22 men killed and 83 wounded along with 896 captured – the soldiers of Grenadier-Regiment Rall, Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg, and Füsilier-Regiment von Knyphausen, the victors of White Plains and Fort Washington, were now prisoners. Patriot losses were far lower, supposedly only two killed and five wounded, though casualties were probably higher in reality given the cold weather, poor clothing, and malnutrition from which the Continental troops were suffering.

Washington had initially hoped that, with the support of Cadwalader and Ewing, he would be able to exploit his victory further by marching on to Princeton and surprising the British garrison there. Neither of the other two divisions had yet made it across the Delaware, however – both had been impeded by the ice, and though Cadwalader's infantry had crossed he had been unable to do the same with his artillery, forcing the unsupported line regiments to return. Washington's own men were also exhausted by the hard marching and fighting, as well as the frigid weather.

Washington decided to secure his prisoners and withdraw before there could be any possibility of retaliation, or he found himself trapped on the wrong side of the river. The victorious little army moved back into Pennsylvania, and had completed their retreat, captive Hessians in tow, by noon on December 26. Knox wrote to his wife two days later: "After having marched off the prisoners and secured the cannon, stores, &c., we returned to the place, nine miles distant, where we had embarked. Providence seemed to have smiled upon every part of this enterprise. Great advantages may be gained from it if we take the proper steps" (Knox 1873: 37).

Analysis

The battles of White Plains, Fort Washington, and Trenton highlight tactical positives and negatives for both Continental and Hessian forces when engaged against one another in the early years of the Revolutionary War. Though Hessian discipline and reliance on the bayonet was more than Patriot forces could endure in open engagements, the core of the Continental Army was a professional force that proved itself capable of its own offensive action as its confidence and experience increased.

At White Plains, the discipline of the Continentals was tested under fire, and while their resistance ultimately collapsed, their withdrawal was not a rout. The delaying action of Spencer's division was well-conducted until its final moments, and the Continentals commanded by McDougall held Chatterton Hill against several assaults while under heavy artillery fire. At the engagement's end, they retired in good order, giving Howe nothing he might be able to exploit with a further assault.

Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton succeeded Lieutenant-General William Howe as the commander-in-chief of British forces in North America in 1777. Perhaps influenced by defeats such as Trenton and Red Bank, he used Hessian regiments less frequently than his predecessor, though this may simply have been due to wider operational constraints. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

Conversely, Rall proved himself to be probably the most effective commander on the battlefield that day. Despite the initial slowness of the Hessian force commanded by Heister, Rall's initiative when hounding Spencer across the Bronx River and then attempting to follow up by seizing Chatterton Hill was enhanced when he remained on the western bank of the river rather than pull back east. This enabled him to mount a flanking attack when the engagement stood in the balance, with victory being attributed to his own grenadier regiment. This combined with the gallantry of the soldiers of Füsilier-Regiment von Lossberg who, despite being relatively inexperienced, conducted a river crossing under heavy fire and carried the assault to the enemy. The tactical use of frontal and flanking bayonet charges broke the Patriot militia, which in turn led to the crumbling of the Continental defense, and a victory for the Crown Forces.

The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776 by John Trumbull (1756–1843). This dramatized depiction shows the mortally wounded Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall meeting with the victorious and magnanimous General George Washington. Among the coterie of officers depicted are Major General Nathanael Greene, Major General John Sullivan, Colonel Henry Knox, and, on the left in buckskins, Major Josiah Parker, who is carrying Rall's sword. The wounded Continental officer behind Rall is Lieutenant James Monroe. (Yale University Art Gallery/ Wikimedia/Public Domain)

At Fort Washington, both sides were well matched in a ferocious, two-hour-long engagement. Rawlings' Continental riflemen had the advantage of excellent terrain – a very steep slope covered with rocks and trees – as well as prepared defensive positions and close artillery support. The Hessian assault columns had a heavy numerical advantage, but were required to go on the offensive against well-prepared, dug-in and determined troops. What followed was a grinding stalemate. While the shortcomings of the American long rifle might have contributed to the retreat of Rawlings' riflemen – as did the collapse of Patriot resistance elsewhere along the fort's overextended outworks – the Hessians remained closely engaged despite high casualties, and ultimately were able to storm the artillery redoubts at bayonet point. Like Rall, Knyphausen proved to be an inspirational commander under fire, and led from the front as the hill was captured. British officers were impressed by the determination of the Hessians and their leader, and the redesignation of Fort Washington as Fort Knyphausen was a fitting tribute to the men who had overrun the Patriot positions at their strongest point.

At Trenton, Hessian negligence has perhaps been overplayed. Rall was aware of the dangerous position of his garrison, and personally saw to, and reinforced, his pickets not long before the engagement. His troops were not drunk, nor were they caught wholly unawares. Nevertheless, he also underestimated the abilities and determination of the Continental Army, and his belief that there was no point in making the town defensible was a serious blunder. A perfect storm (in a sense, literally) arose from the inactivity of the nearby British outposts in supporting or reinforcing him, Donop's lingering in Mount Holly, the failed Patriot raid on the night of December 25/26, the storm itself causing the Hessian pickets to withdraw to their guardhouses, and the cancellation of the predawn patrol.

George Washington being presented with captured Hessian colors in the aftermath of the battle of Trenton. The flags themselves are anachronistic, and the foremost one appears to have been modeled on the flag of another German state, Ansbach-Bayreuth, captured at the battle of Yorktown, rather than a flag of Hessen-Cassel. (Universal History Archive/Contributor/Getty Images)

When battle was joined the tactics of the Continentals were sound, and won the engagement almost before it had begun. Washington's boldness and alacrity and the aggressiveness of his two divisional commanders meant the battlefield's strategic locations – the high ground and street junctions in the town's north, and the bridge to its south – were secured before the Hessians were actually able to get into action. The Patriot battle plan was executed to perfection.

The Hessians were unable to formulate a coherent response. The rain and the nature of street fighting meant the fusilier and grenadier regiments could not fully engage in anything resembling a traditional close-order firefight, leaving recourse to the bayonet alone. While this might have been enough in the previous engagements, the Continentals' excellent use of their artillery in close support with the infantry to dominate Trenton's major thoroughfares ensured they repulsed every Hessian attempt at breaking out, as well as quickly ending the threat posed by the Hessians' own artillery.

While there were positive aspects to the Hessian resistance – the relatively measured withdrawal of the pickets, the fact that the regiments were able to form at all and weren't caught wholly by surprise in their billets, and the courage of Rall and his men in repeatedly counterattacking into a storm of musketry and cannon fire – these all counted for little once the Continentals had attained tactical control and shaped the battlefield around their own planned form of engagement. The result was arguably Washington's finest victory, a building block for further successes, and a humiliation for the Hessians that hung over them for the rest of the Revolutionary War.

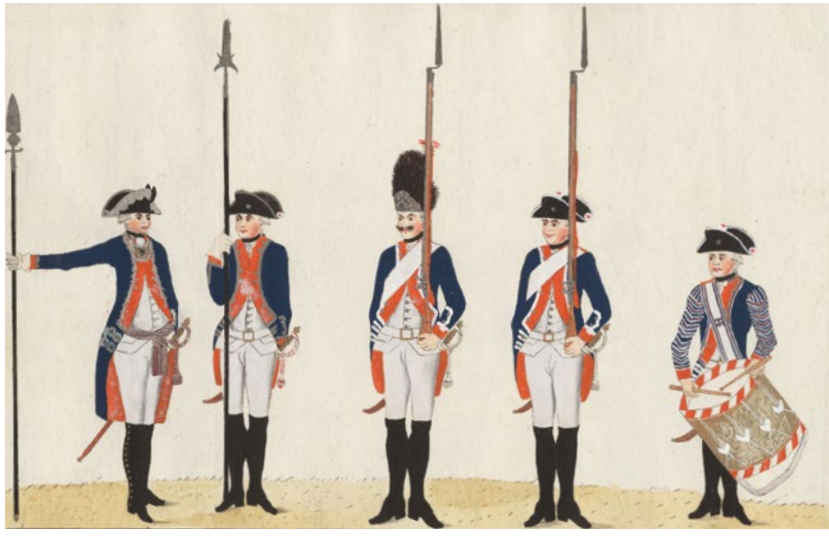
Aftermath

The attempts by Crown Forces to capture New York City and deal a heavy blow to the Continental Army in late 1776 were largely successful, and the forces of Hessen-Cassel played an important role in the British victories. Despite this, the Continental Army's resurgence at not only the battle of Trenton, but also at the battle of Princeton a week later, greatly rejuvenated the morale of the revolutionaries while dismaying the British and their allies. While British sources attempted to underplay the impact of what they viewed as little more than a set of large skirmishes, there is no doubt that the outcome of the battle of Trenton cast a shadow over the Hessian corps. They no longer seemed as alien or fearsome to the Patriots, who knew the Hessians could be beaten.

Despite this, Hessian forces initially continued to play an important part in British efforts to subdue the colonies. The early months of 1777 were spent in a damaging *petite guerre* in New Jersey, but when Howe finally opened the campaign the Hessians won a sharp skirmish at Short Hills and later repeated their role from Long Island at the battle of Brandywine on September 11. Knyphausen was charged with pinning Washington's attention at Chadds Ford while a wide flanking maneuver by the main British force turned his flank. The tactic worked again, and the Hessians subsequently broke through the Continental defenses and completed the rout.

Despite their defeat, the Continentals again showed their improved capacity for offensive warfare by attempting to repeat Trenton at the battle of Germantown, on October 4. On this occasion Crown Forces stood firm, among them the Hessian *Jäger*, Füsilier-Regiment Erbprinz, Musketier-Regiment von Donop, and *Grenadier-Bataillone* von Linsing and von Minnigerode.

The last major combat featuring large numbers of Hessian troops occurred on October 22, 1777, at Fort Mercer (sometimes called Fort Red Bank). The Hessian attempt to seize the fort went poorly almost from the beginning. Howe had intelligence that the defenses were incomplete, but this information was outdated and inaccurate. The British commander-in-chief



The unit known for most of the Revolutionary War as Musketier-Regiment von Mirbach changed its title in February 1781, becoming Musketier-Regiment von Jung-Lossberg. Major-General Friedrich Wilhelm von Lossberg became the regiment's colonel in 1780, causing the name change. The regiment fought at Long Island, White Plains, Fort Washington, and Brandywine. (Buyenlarge/Contributor/Getty Images)

ordered Donop to take the fort, but added that he should only attempt to storm it if he thought it practical. Donop believed his orders were much less flexible, and was further stung by what he considered to be a veiled insult from Cornwallis, who informed him that if he felt his Hessian grenadiers could not carry the fort, the British would. Donop was eager to claim another victory like Fort Washington, and advanced almost wholly unsupported.

On finding that the fort was in fact complete and garrisoned by over 400 Continental troops supported by militia, Donop briefly prevaricated, telling a junior British officer accompanying him, Major Charles Stuart, that if Stuart would advise him to delay his attack, he would. Stuart claimed he did not have the authority to advise Donop to halt, and the assault went in without heavy artillery support. In a fit of anger, Donop was said to have declared to his subordinates "either that [Fort Mercer] will be Fort Donop or I shall be dead" (quoted in Eelking 1893: 117).

With Musketier-Regiment von Mirbach in reserve, *Grenadier-Bataillone* von Lengerke (formerly von Block), von Linsing, and von Minnigerode charged the fort. The attack, made with all the courage the Hessians had displayed in past engagements, faltered against the redoubts, ditches, and abatis, struck by a hail of musket and artillery fire not just from the Continental defenders, but from gunboats on the nearby Delaware River. The 1st and 2d Rhode Island regiments, tasked with defending the fort, shattered the Hessian assault with their concentrated firepower, and the attack was eventually repelled. Many grenadier officers fell, including Donop, who died from his wounds the next day.

The defeat at Red Bank was another boost to Patriot morale at a difficult time for the Continental Army, and it was in some ways an even greater blow to the Hessians than the debacle at Trenton. Though the fort was taken by the British a month later, a pall had fallen over the Landgraf's forces in America, and in the six months that followed a notable number of officers applied for leave to return home, while desertions among the rank and file surged. Meanwhile, Continental troops settled into the long, bitterly cold winter at Valley Forge, where they would pass another milestone on the march toward

Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze (1816–68) painted this celebrated 1851 piece, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Though the painting has many anachronisms, from the style of flag to the small rowing boats being used, some elements, such as the crewmen fending off ice, or a number of the uniforms on display, are accurate. (GraphicaArtis/Contributor/Getty Images)

becoming a fully functioning, European-style professional fighting force. As they had done over the winter of 1776, the Continental Army went into action in the spring of 1777 with renewed confidence, discipline, and ability.

Other than a short and unsuccessful expedition into New Jersey in June 1780, after Red Bank the Hessian corps did not see action again in large numbers, though Hessian regiments continued to serve, frequently with distinction, alongside other Crown Forces throughout the war. The Leib-Infanterie-Regiment, Füsilier-Regiment von Ditfurth, and *Garnisons-Regimenter* von Huyn and von Bünau repelled Continental troops at the battle of Rhode Island on August 29, 1778. Garnisons-Regiment von Wissenbach and the reconstituted Grenadier-Regiment Rall – now renamed Grenadier-Regiment Trümbach, after its new commander – regained some of their honor at the successful capture of Savannah on December 29, 1778, the victorious battle of Stono Ferry on June 20, 1779, and the subsequent defense of Savannah against a Franco-American army. Musketier-Regiment von Bose served with Cornwallis's army in the south, eventually being captured at Yorktown alongside the redesignated Musketier-Regiment Erbprinz.

Ultimately, over the course of the war the Continental Army proved itself to be a match for the professional soldiery of Hessen-Cassel. While Hessian troops fought with aggression and an iron resolve, Continental forces opposing them proved no-less brave, and while they struggled initially with inexperience and a focus on defensive operations, as the war continued the Patriots showed that their steadiness on the battlefield was a match for their enemies – British or Hessian – and that firepower could trump the use of the bayonet. That being said, the British Crown would not have been able to operate on anything like the scale it did throughout the war without the contribution of the Hessen-Cassel corps. The victories won by Hessian troops indicate that the reputation they had in the American colonies as fierce and effective troops was not misplaced.

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

Continental

Following reorganization in late 1775 and early 1776, the Continental Army standardized each infantry regiment around a single battalion of eight companies, following a similar model to the one used by the Britain Army, but without a grenadier company. The regiment's headquarters consisted of one colonel, one lieutenant colonel, and one major, with a staff made up of one surgeon and his surgeon's mate, one adjutant, one quartermaster, one paymaster, one sergeant major, one quartermaster sergeant, one drum major, one fife major, and one chaplain. Such a staff was not always present on the battlefield in its entirety, but having dedicated roles for quartermaster, adjutant, and paymaster helped ensure administrative duties did not take up too much time of the company officers, a problem that British officers frequently faced. The sergeant major and the quartermaster sergeant also assisted with the work of the adjutant and quartermaster respectively, further distributing the administrative burden.

Each of a battalion's eight companies was commanded by a captain, with a first lieutenant, a second lieutenant, and an ensign forming the remainder of the officer corps. Four sergeants and four corporals, one drummer, one fifer, and 76 privates completed a company's strength. A battalion therefore had a full strength of 672 enlisted men (not counting the drummers and fifers) and 35 officers (including the field officers but not the regimental staff). It should be noted, however, that this full complement was almost never reached, and the vast majority of Continental infantry regiments went into battle at half this strength or lower – sometimes barely 100 men, with battalions commonly forming brigades that barely reached the strength of a single regiment on-paper (Wright 1983: 49–51). The use of brigading helped ensure that individually small regiments were still able to have an impact on the battlefield, and allowed them to outnumber individual British or Hessian regiments.

Hessian

Like the Prussian Army, Hessen-Cassel infantry regiments were usually composed of two battalions, but the corps assembled for America was reorganized to consist of single-battalion regiments. Each regiment had a headquarters of one colonel (a senior officer who was often absent in the field), one lieutenant colonel, and one major, and a staff of one adjutant, one quartermaster, one judge advocate, one chaplain, one senior surgeon, one wagonmaster, one drum major, six musicians, one armorer, one provost, one assistant provost, and two drivers. This was a far larger staff than those possessed by either Continental or British regiments, and was intended to provide a degree of self-sufficiency for each regiment – for example, the wagonmaster and drivers were in charge of transportation, while the provost and his assistant oversaw matters of discipline, meaning such roles were kept within the regiment and, in theory, did not require the use of external support bodies.

Each Hessian infantry battalion was composed of five companies, four musketeer and one grenadier, each consisting of one captain, two lieutenants, one ensign, three sergeants, one quartermaster sergeant, one provost sergeant, seven corporals, one junior surgeon, three drummers, one clerk, four officers' servants, and 105 privates. The field officers also commanded companies in place of a captain, however, with the colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major leading three of the five companies, if they were present with the regiment. The single grenadier company was also detached to form ad hoc grenadier battalions composed of grenadier companies from multiple regiments. Thanks to this, a Hessian battalion's theoretical combat strength consisted of 16 officers and 460 NCOs and enlisted men though, as usual on campaign, this number was almost never actually reached (Wright 1983: 95).

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